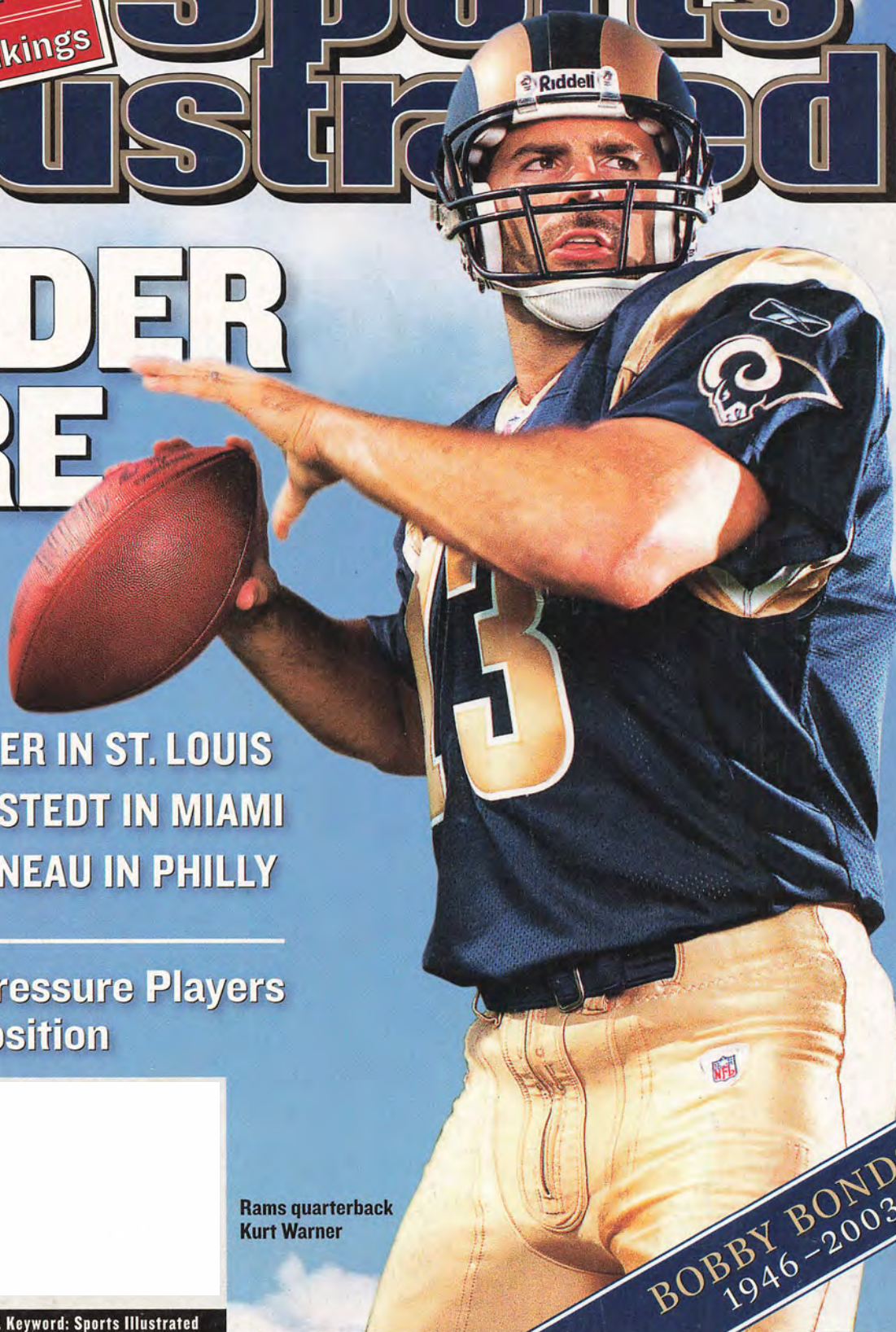


2003 NFL PREVIEW

*** COMPLETE ***
**SCOUTING
REPORTS**
Dr. Z's
Power Rankings

Sports Illustrated

UNDER FIRE



- KURT WARNER IN ST. LOUIS
- DAVE WANNSTEDT IN MIAMI
- MARK SIMONEAU IN PHILLY

PLUS

The Best Pressure Players
At Every Position

Rams quarterback
Kurt Warner

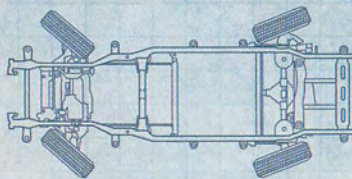
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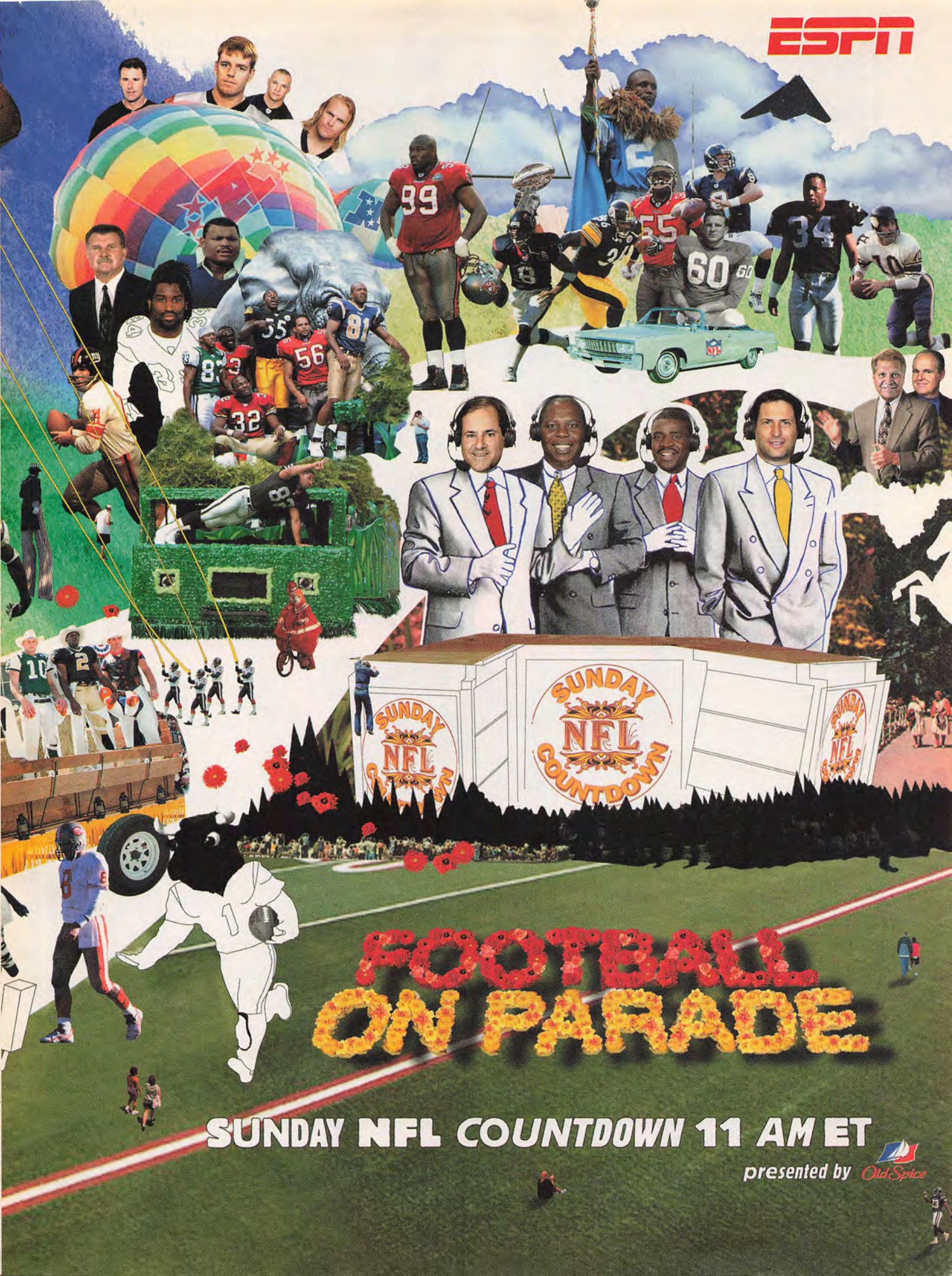
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A photograph of three young men playing basketball outdoors. The man in the foreground, on the left, is wearing a dark grey long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans, and is holding a basketball with both hands. He is looking towards the other two men. The man in the middle is wearing a red long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans, and is looking at the basketball. The man on the right is wearing a light grey long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans, and is looking towards the other two men. They are standing on a grassy area with a wooden building in the background. The word "Wrangler" is overlaid in large red letters across the middle of the image.

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Julie Mulholland at the season opener.

Woman Fakes Love for Football So She Can Drink Heineken at Tailgate

BOSTON, MA—Julie Mulholland, 23, loves shopping and getting her hair done but come Sundays she loves football. "I can't even sleep the night before a big game," says Mulholland. Those close to her think it may all just be an act to hang out and drink Heineken though.

"She never knows when to clap," said Melissa White who sits behind her.

People down in front of Mulholland

were also annoyed by her presence. "She thinks doing the wave is a new thing," cried a couple down to see the game from Buffalo.

One fan, who asked to remain anonymous, claims to have heard music coming from her headphones and not the game.

When asked to comment, Mulholland faked an ankle injury and was taken to a nearby hospital.

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Heineken

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SI.com

Got fantasy football game? Bang helmets with other aspiring G.M.'s and compete to win prizes by joining a league, or running your own, at si.com/fantasy.

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50 Beware the Bats

Powered by catcher Javy Lopez, Atlanta is winning not with pitching but with hitting **by Daniel G. Habib**

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Bobby Bonds was a player so hounded by expectations that his career was unappreciated **by Ron Fimrite**

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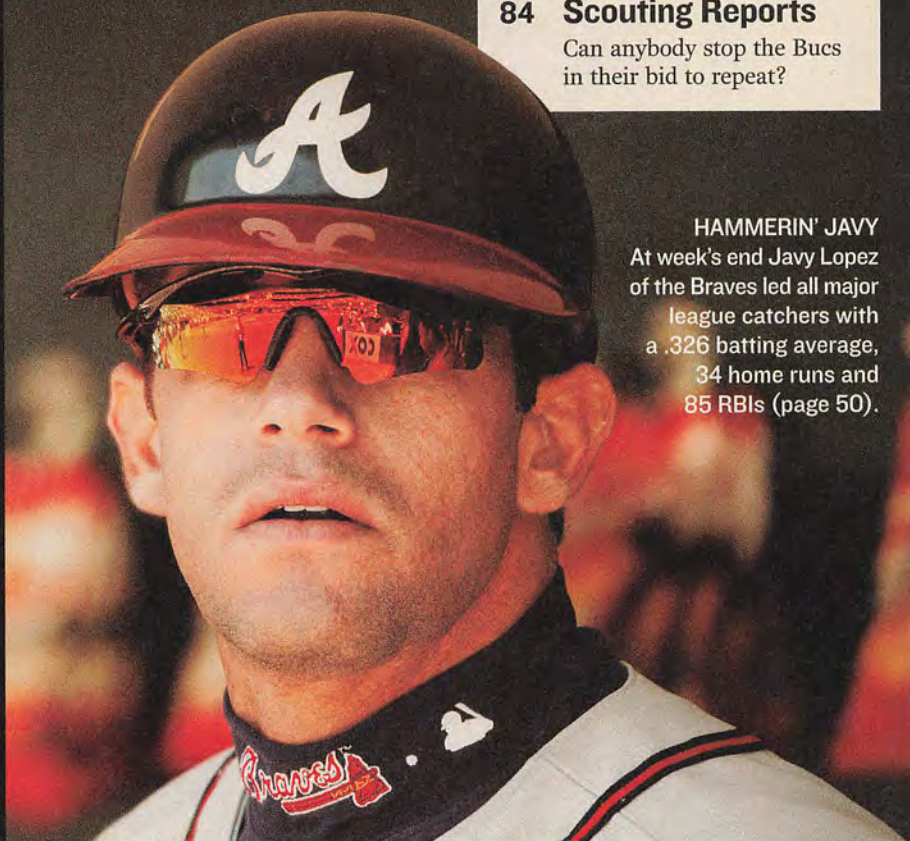
Is this Dave Wannstedt's last chance in Miami? **by Jeffri Chadiha**

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When a game's on the line, these pros are the best **by Paul Zimmerman**

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Can anybody stop the Bucs in their bid to repeat?



HAMMERIN' JAVY

At week's end Javy Lopez of the Braves led all major league catchers with a .326 batting average, 34 home runs and 85 RBIs (page 50).

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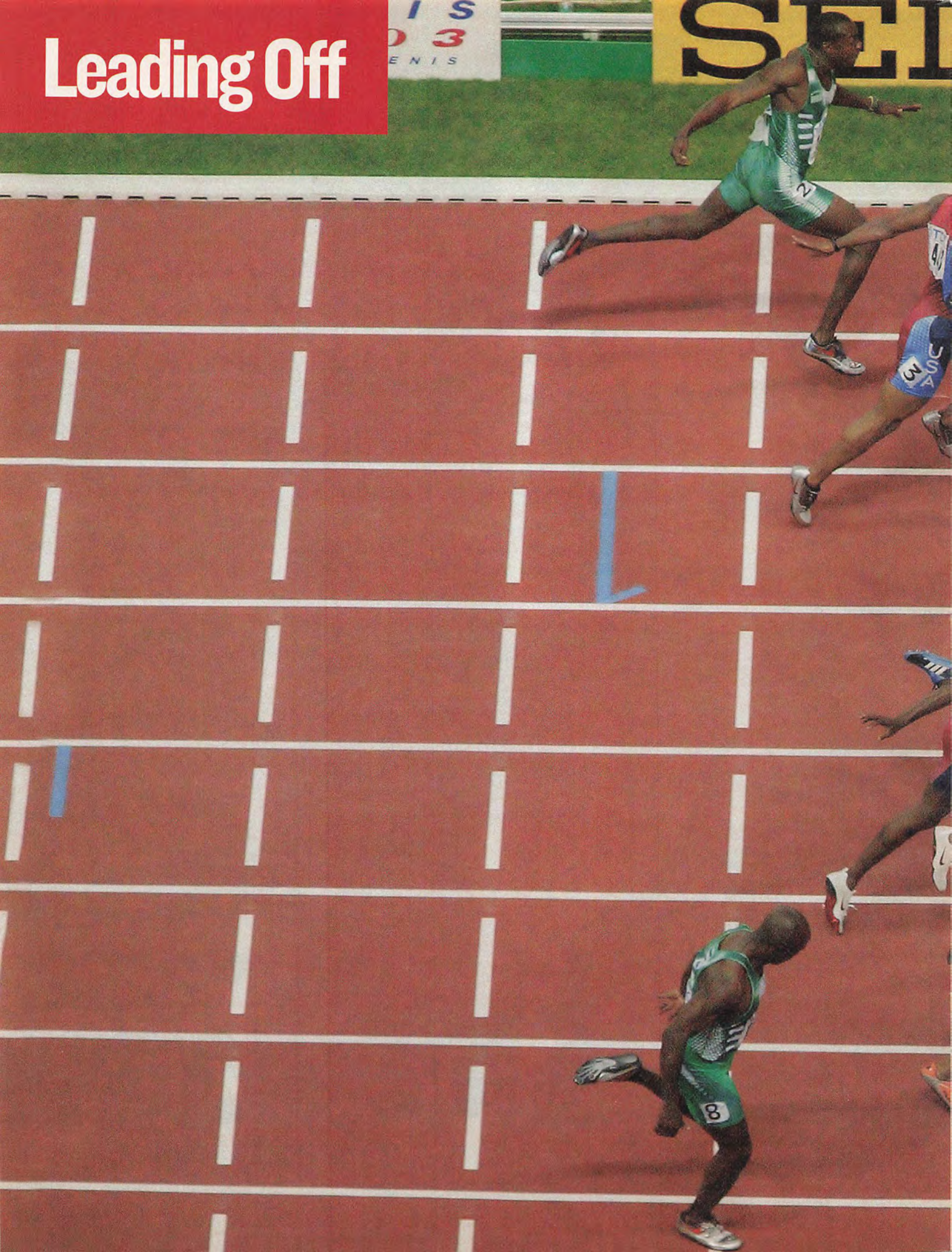
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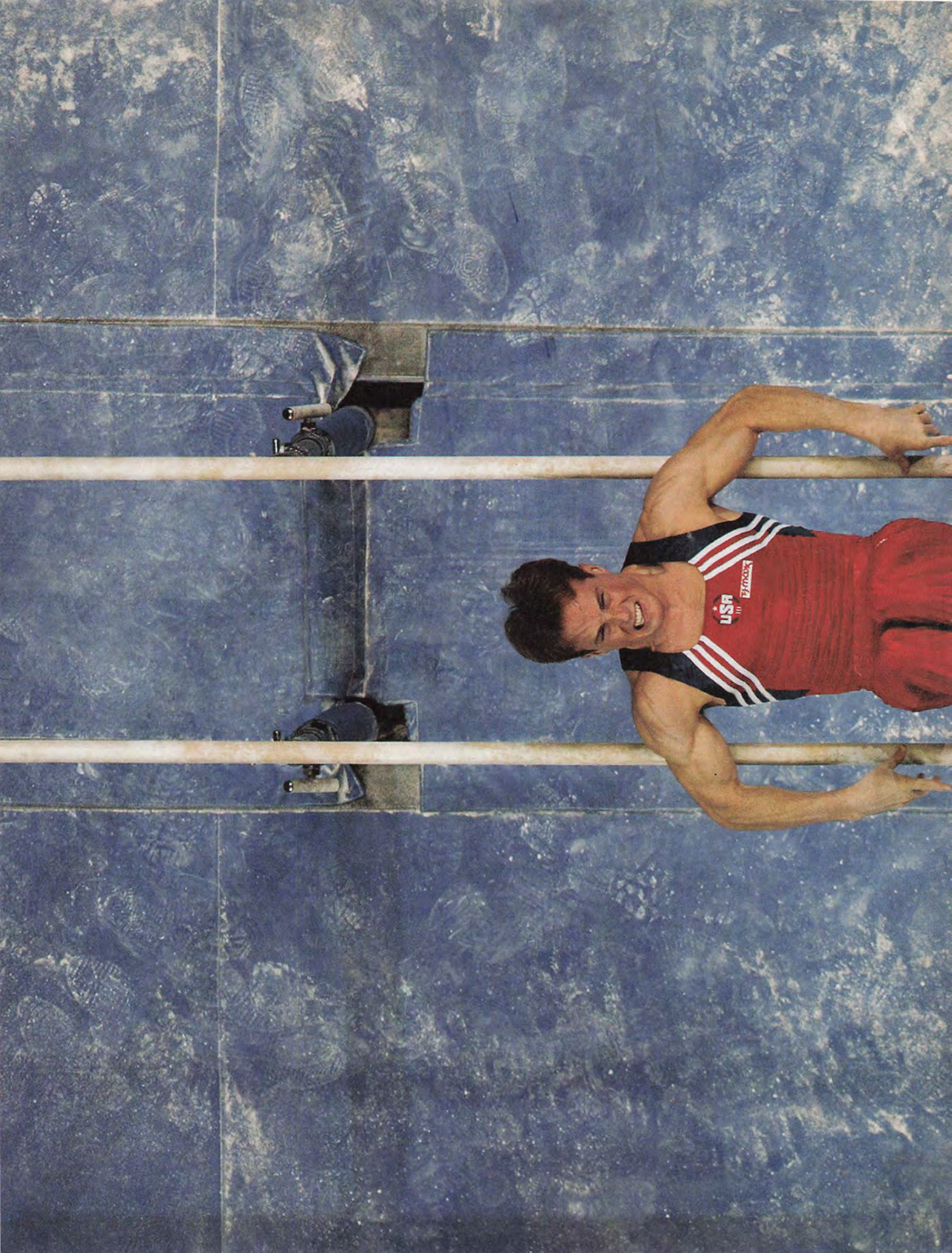


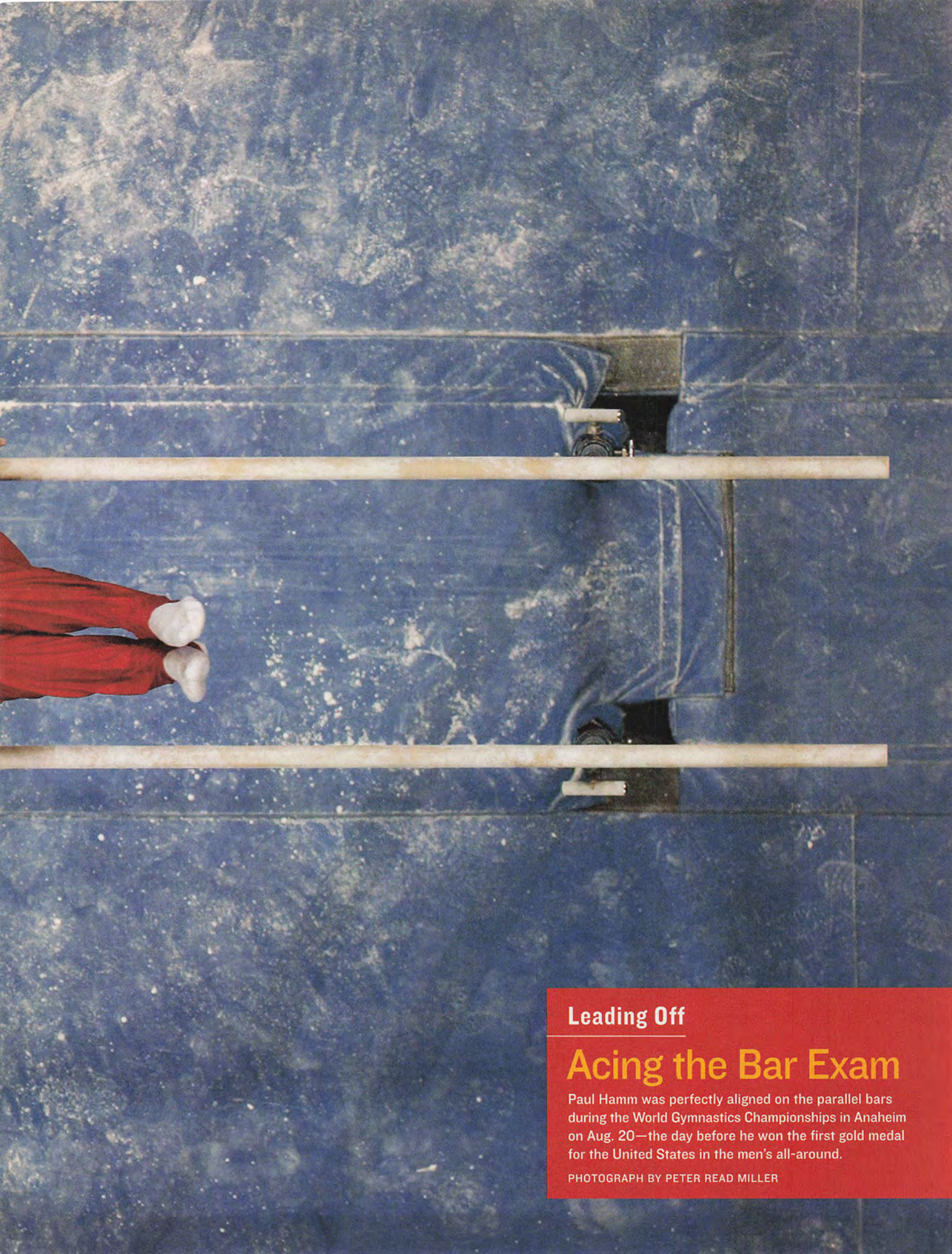


Nose Job

Kim Collins (top) of St. Kitts and Nevis wins the men's 100 meters in a blanket finish at the ninth World Track and Field Championships in Paris on Monday.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BOB ROSATO





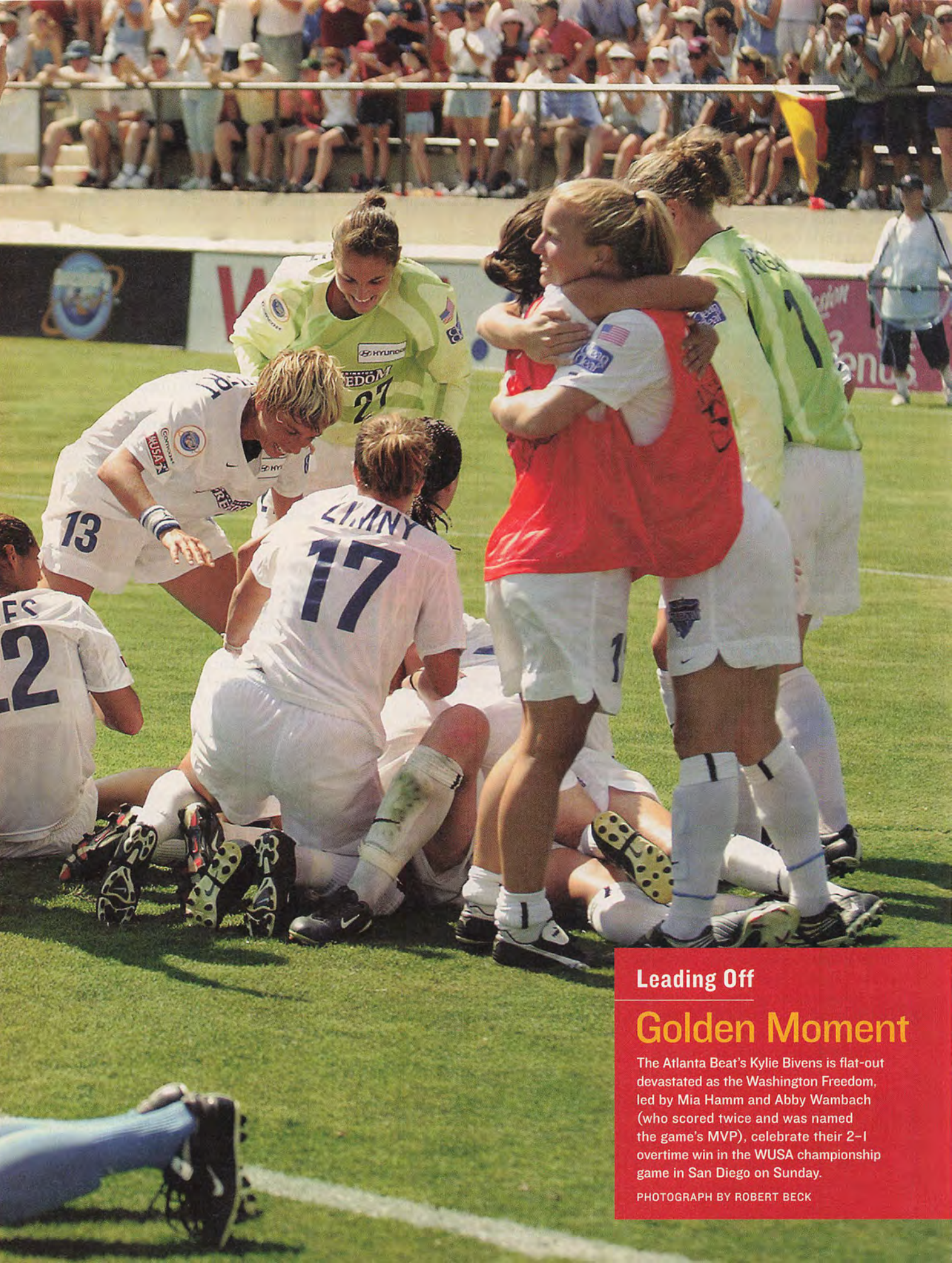
Leading Off

Acing the Bar Exam

Paul Hamm was perfectly aligned on the parallel bars during the World Gymnastics Championships in Anaheim on Aug. 20—the day before he won the first gold medal for the United States in the men's all-around.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PETER READ MILLER





Leading Off

Golden Moment

The Atlanta Beat's Kylie Bivens is flat-out devastated as the Washington Freedom, led by Mia Hamm and Abby Wambach (who scored twice and was named the game's MVP), celebrate their 2-1 overtime win in the WUSA championship game in San Diego on Sunday.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERT BECK

Mind Games

What a wonderful article about Ohio State quarterback Craig Krenzel in SI's College Football Preview (*A Beautiful Mind*, Aug. 11). I was delighted to read about a young man who has his head on straight and is doing great things not only on the football field but also in the classroom. Last year's run to the national championship was a thrill every step of the way, and I am eager for this year to begin so I can watch Krenzel, coach Jim Tressel and the rest of the Buckeyes fight their way to another national championship. Let's go Bucks!

*Erlina Mae Bowers
Pittsburgh*

As a college athletic administrator, I found it refreshing to see features on guys like Craig Krenzel and Jonathan Vilma (*All Business*, Aug. 11). In a year when college sports have been marred by lying, cheating, drugs, immoral behavior and even homicide, SI deserves kudos for pointing out that there are still plenty of good values, good stories and, most important, good people in college athletics.

Tim McMurray, New Braunfels, Texas

Why does Krenzel, the poster boy for brain power, require a band on his arm with all the plays listed? Can't he remember them, or was that his grocery list?

Lindsay Brown, St. Simons Island, Ga.

While your lineup of top college coaches (*Wise Guides*, Aug. 11) was a fine one, it quacked me up that you left out Oregon's Mike Bellotti. During his tenure the Ducks have amassed one of the best records in the Pac-10 and won several bowl games, not to mention earning a No. 2 national ranking. Maybe we need another billboard in Times Square to get your attention.

Neal Rosen, San Mateo, Calif.

Rank Injustice

So let me get this straight. Your 2003 college football report contains no non-BCS teams in the Top 25, no non-BCS

players in your Heisman Watch, no non-BCS players on your 2003 All-America team and no non-BCS *Must-See Games*. It's sad that the BCS has clouded your approach to reporting college football just as it has for the rest of our nation's sports media.

Jan R. Horsfall, Colorado Springs

I was surprised SI did not have Northeastern ranked in the Division I-AA Top 10. The Huskies won their conference last year, and coach Don Brown has several returning lettermen.

*Dan Hillard
Easton, Pa.*

I'm disappointed your D-III rankings did not include any teams from the Northwest Conference. Last year the Linfield Wildcats completed their regular season without a loss, their 47th consecutive winning year, and made it to the quarterfinals of the D-III playoffs. They look very ready to make it 48.

Alex Baxter, Boise, Idaho

Crime and Punishment

Thanks, Rick Reilly, for sticking up for Rick Majerus (*THE LIFE OF REILLY*, Aug. 11), one of the sports world's truly good men. *Corrupting Our Utes* may have been funny, but it was also right on target in its depiction of Majerus's compassion for his players and the absurdity of the NCAA's rules. The real crime here is that the NCAA spends time and money busting Majerus while neglecting serious problems that fester, ironically, because there simply aren't enough leaders of his caliber.

Laura Marran, Kenosha, Wis.

We desperately need the NCAA to enforce important things central to the mission of a university, such as graduation rates and the integrity of the concept of the student-athlete. That a school can be penalized for buying players \$20 worth of groceries, but not for graduating less than 30% of its athletes, shows exactly what's wrong with the NCAA.

Art Miller, Lisle, Ill.

Your examples of nitpicking hit home. My niece was on a basketball scholarship at Fort Hays (Kans.) State when her dad (my brother) died suddenly. The basketball coach and his wife had to tell my niece. Since the coach could not drive her home—it would have been a rules violation—he arranged for a senior player to drive my niece, while the coach and his wife followed them in his car. My family is forever grateful to the coach, but find it hard to believe these rules exist. Coaches who try to take care of their student-athletes in such situations deserve to be thanked, not punished, by the NCAA.

Kathryn Bunnell, Grand Lake, Okla.

Instead of punishing him and his program, the NCAA should be holding up Majerus as an example of what a college coach should be: focused on more than the game, caring and compassionate toward his athletes and dedicated to his school.

Cortney Schaffer, Jackson, Mich.

Ship Shape

No NASCAR drivers on the ark (*AIR AND SPACE*, Aug. 11)? Steve Rushin mustn't be aware that NASCAR is the only widely televised sport that broadcasts a prayer before the start of each event. I think NASCAR drivers not only would be allowed to board the mighty vessel, but also would be seated at the captain's table.

Perry Anderson, Athens, La.

Off the Mark

You wrote that Missouri's greatest sports moment was when Mark McGwire broke Roger Maris's single-season mark of 61 home runs (*Sports in America*, Aug. 11) and "all of America stood and cheered." As a Yankees fan, I can tell you that many of us stayed seated and kept our hands apart.

Jeff Apley, Howard Beach, N.Y.

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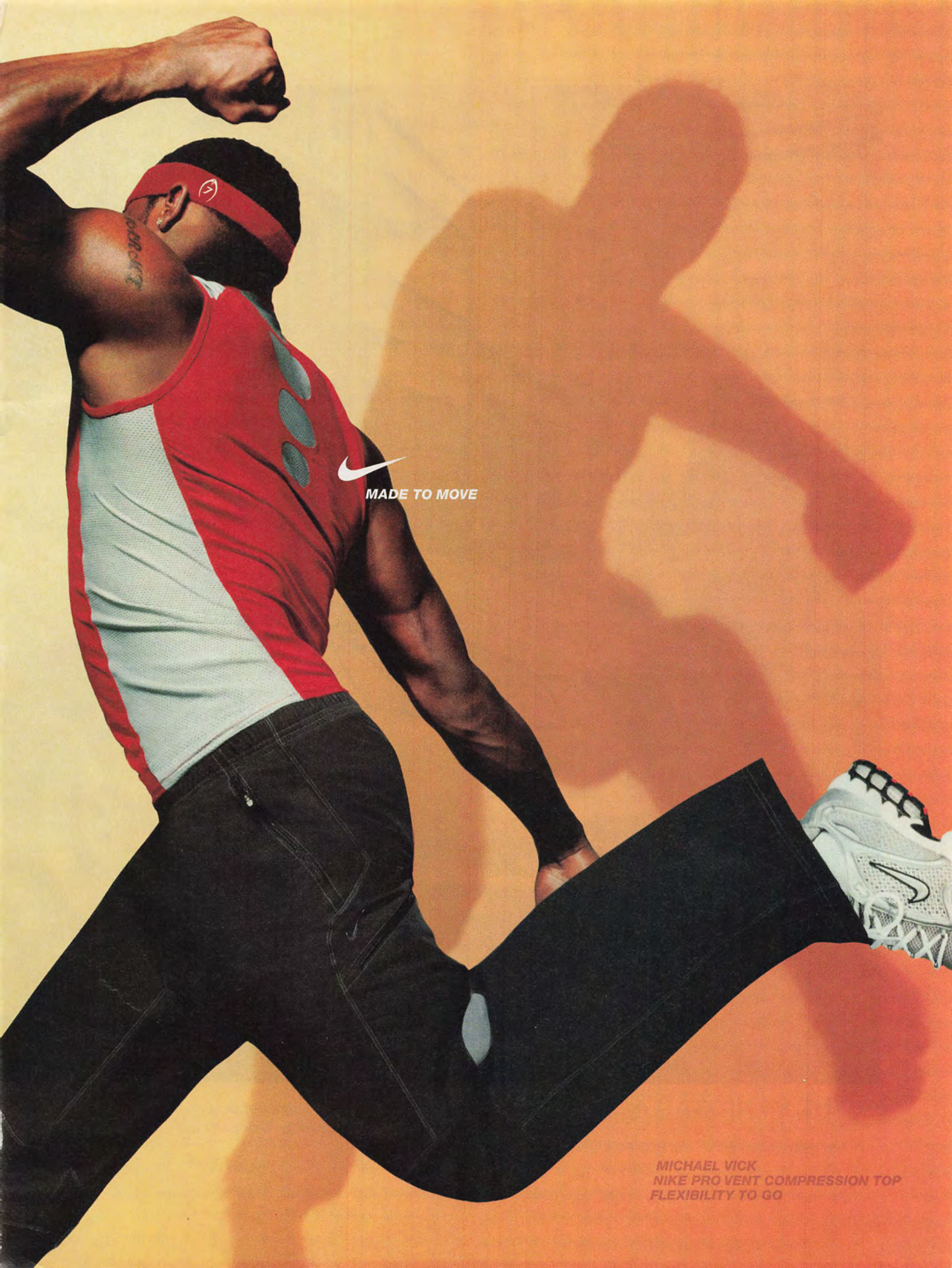
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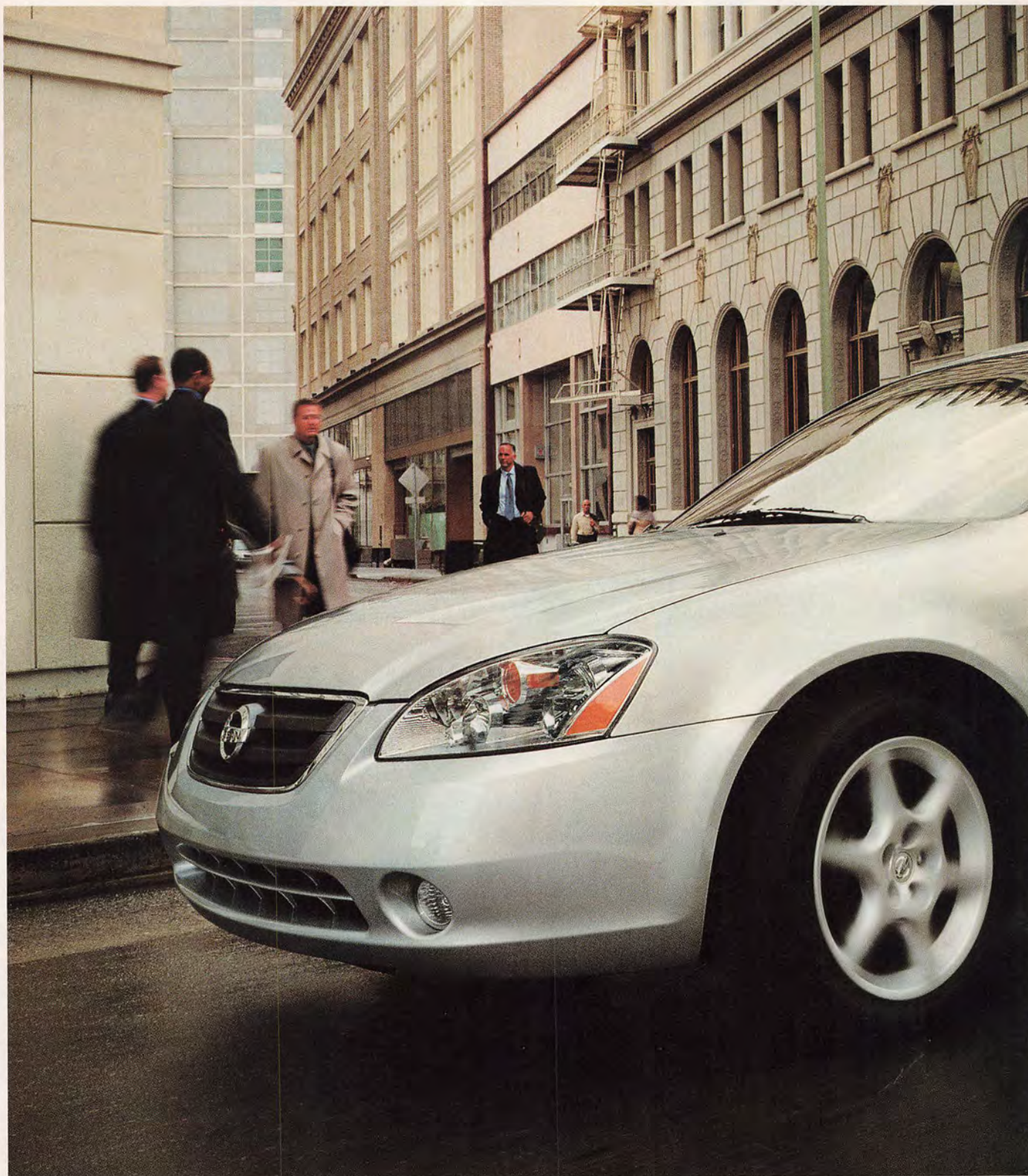
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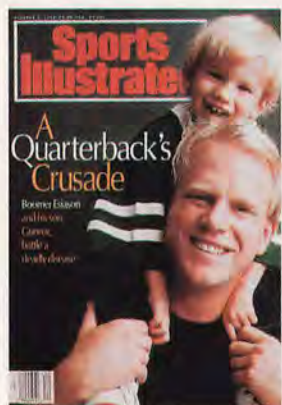
Boomer and Gunnar Esiason

OCTOBER 4, 1993

IT HAPPENS in airports, in grocery stores and practically everywhere else Boomer Esiason goes. People see the white hair and the 6' 5" frame, and there is a glint of recognition, followed by the same question, always the same question: "How's your son doing?" Rarely do they ask Esiason about his 14-year NFL career or his work as a commentator on *The NFL Today* and Westwood One radio. No, it's always about Gunnar, the little boy they remember with cystic fibrosis. "People kind of forget what I did on the football field," says Esiason. "That's perfectly fine with me. That means we're making a difference."

It was nearly a decade ago that Boomer and Gunnar appeared on the cover of SI, the 2½-year-old son perched on the father's shoulders. Since then Esiason has gone from being the starting quarterback for the New York Jets to the country's most visible advocate of research for cystic fibrosis, a disease of the lungs and digestive system

After starring as an NFL passer, Boomer has led the fight against cystic fibrosis, the disease that threatens the life of his son.



LIKE FATHER . . . Gunnar is fit enough to play four sports.

Like most 12-year-old boys, Gunnar is attached to his Nintendo Gamecube, his PlayStation 2 and his Xbox, but he also plays baseball (second base), hockey (left wing), lacrosse (attack) and soccer (fullback). Of course, Gunnar is nothing like most seventh-graders in other ways: He has a persistent cough, undergoes two sessions of about 30 to 45 minutes each day, during which Boomer or his wife, Cheryl, clear the mucus from his lungs, and swallows eight enzyme tablets with every meal to help digest his food.

Not that you'll hear Gunnar complain. Last March he got up at his father's annual cystic fibrosis black-tie event and gave a three-minute speech about life with the disease. "I talked about how my dad was my hero and about my experiences," says Gunnar, who admits he was "real, real nervous" speaking in front of a big crowd for the first time. When he finished, all 600 people—including his beaming dad—stood and applauded.

Since retiring from the NFL after the 1997 season, Boomer has devoted most of his free time stumping for the fight against cystic fibrosis and says that he's driven by one goal. "I want to allow Gunnar the honor of being a father himself," says Boomer. "And I'm not going to stop working until we beat this thing."

—Chris Ballard

that afflicts 30,000 children and young adults in the U.S. and 70,000 worldwide. The Boomer Esiason Cystic Fibrosis Foundation has raised more than \$22 million since it was founded 10 years ago.

As for Gunnar, the second-youngest cover subject in the history of the magazine, he is now a wiry 5' 5" 85-pounder headed into the seventh grade on Long Island. Though he has suffered no serious complications from the disease in the last 10 years, he is thin for his age and will remain so. His dad affectionately calls him Stick.

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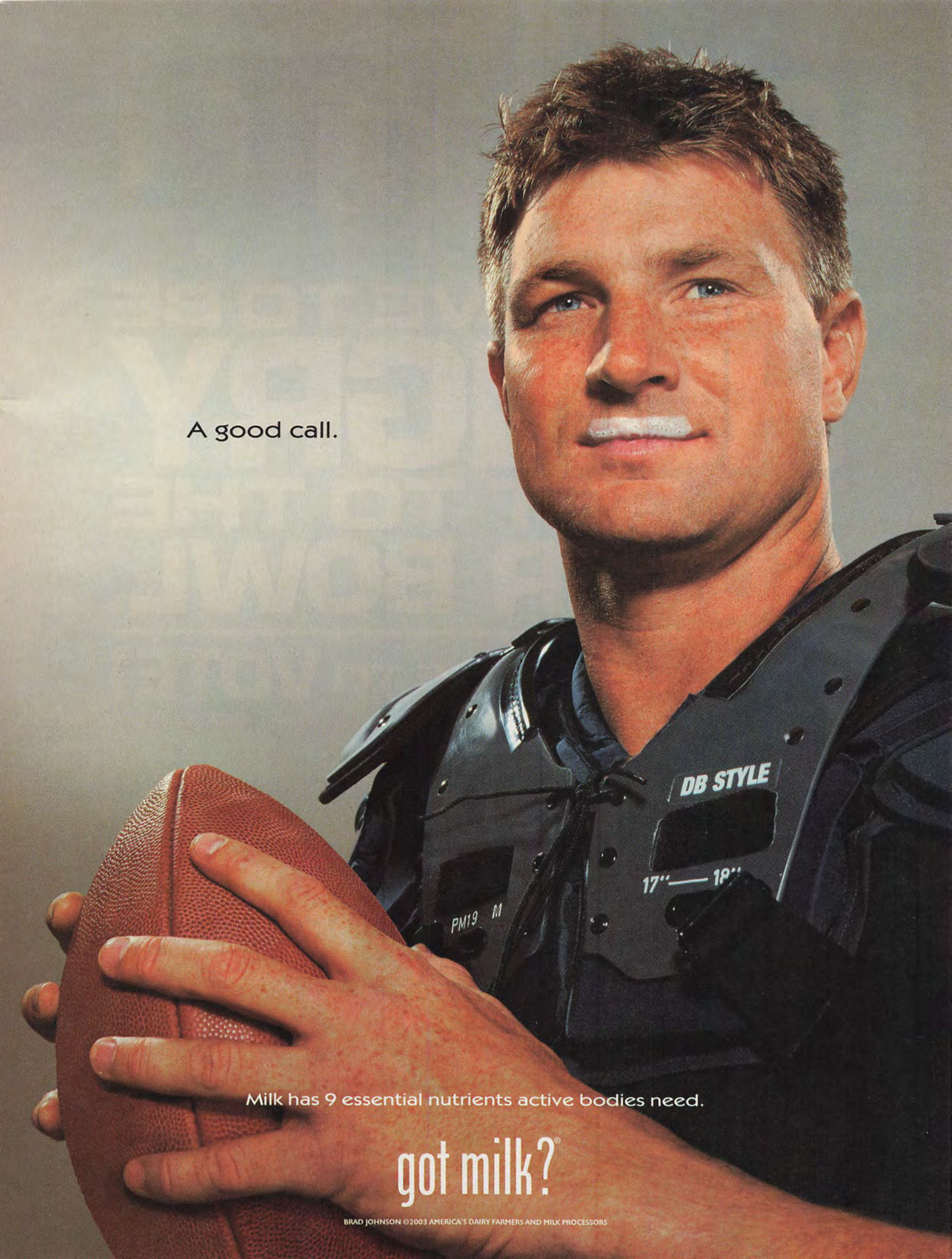
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A close-up portrait of Brad Johnson, a professional football player, wearing a dark blue jersey with a black shoulder pad. He is holding a brown football with both hands. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

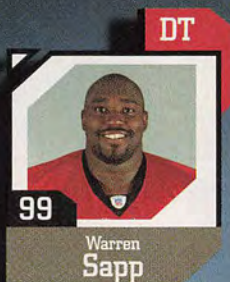
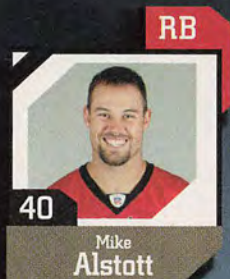
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Tiger Balm

by Steve Rushin



ASPIRING AUTHOR Ted Geisel's first manuscript was rejected 28 times, prompting him to reflect, years later, "When you're in a slump/You're not in for much fun./Un-Slumping yourself/Is not easily done." (The writer, of course, escaped life's caboose/Un-Slumping himself into Dr. Seuss.)

Van Gogh died having sold as many paintings (one) as he had ears. Kevin O'Connell became Hollywood's most famous—or least anonymous—sound mixer after losing all 15 Oscars for which he was nominated. And *still* he showed up for this year's ceremony, at which he lost his 16th.

"It's been a really positive experience," O'Connell said after losing his 15th. "I don't look at it as being a loser."

All of which is to tell the 2003 Detroit Tigers, who may become the losingest team in baseball history, to hang in there. "There's a kind of reverse immortality that accrues to players on such teams," says Pat Toomay, who played defensive end for the 1976 Tampa Bay Buccaneers, the only NFL team to lose all of its games. The Tigers, who at week's end were 32–97 for a .248 winning percentage, may yet break the major league records for most losses in a season (120, by the '62 Mets) and worst winning percentage (.235, by the '16 Athletics) and, given their 106-loss season in '02, have an outside shot at most losses in consecutive seasons (231, by the '62 and '63 Mets). They've already set a record for the worst starts in successive seasons—0–11 in '02 and 0–9 in '03—one-downing the '62 and '63 Mets, of course.

But those Mets were bad the way God is good. Their badness will endure forever. The late Richie Ashburn, MVP of the '62 Mets, was a Whiz Kid on the pennant-winning Phillies of 1950, with a .308 average in 15 big league seasons, and no less than Red Smith wrote that he belonged in the Hall of Fame. And yet, Ashburn told me 30 years after the summer of '62, "I get more mail for that one season than I get for all my years before that."

At worst, then, these Tigers will become beloved. "It's like a child in school who is slower than the other students," says Felix Monserrate, who in 1995 traded a decrepit Ford van with 188,000 miles on it for Zippy Chippy, the lethargic thoroughbred that went on to lose 97 races in a row. "You don't kick that kid out of class. You give him more attention to see that he makes it."

Tigers, take heart: In July, Zippy Chippy defeated Miss Batavia—a harness horse, not a beauty contestant—in a half-mile race at Batavia Downs.

A year earlier, after losing his 21st consecutive tennis match—the longest streak in ATP tour history—Vince Spadea couldn't persuade his own *parents* to attend his Wimbledon opening-round match . . . in which he upset Greg Rusedski.

Success has many fathers. Failure has many sons (and daughters), and many of them are successful. "People forget," says Toomay, "but the quarterback of our horrible Tampa team was none other than Steve Spurrier, who went on to become the finest offensive mind in the college game. Our [vice president of operations] that year was Ron Wolf, who put together the championship Packers. Defensive backs coach Wayne Fontes became the most successful Lions head coach since Joe Schmidt—pushing it, I know—and Lee Roy Selmon, a rookie that year, went on to the Hall of Fame."

By '76 Toomay himself had already played in two Super Bowls (with Dallas), and he has since forged a second successful career as a novelist. Thus, Mike Maroth, the Detroit pitcher whose surname is a thinly anagrammatized nod to Mothra—heartbreaking loser to Godzilla in *Godzilla vs. Mothra*—is almost certainly marked for greatness. Following Maroth's 18th loss, to Texas last week,

Rangers shortstop Alex Rodriguez said, "I think he'll be a big winner in the majors."

Or as the former Ted Geisel put it in *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* "The magical things you can do with that ball/Will make you the winning-est winner of all./Fame! You'll be famous as famous can be/With the whole wide world watching you win on TV."

"There's a reverse immortality that accrues to players on [alltime losingest] teams," says Toomay.

Until then, Maroth (6–18 at week's end) might become the first pitcher since Oakland's Brian Kingman in 1980 to lose 20 games. Of course, 20 losses is nothing, as Reggie Strickland (a record 248 career boxing losses) or Zippy Chippy will attest. "People think winning is everything," says Monserrate. "But every time my horse comes to the barn, it's like he won. He never changes. People are not like that. Some owners and trainers, if their horse doesn't win right away, they get rid of him. I say, Why quit, when you can keep trying? In the end, you'll make it."

And if you don't? "When all these rationalizations fail, you can always turn to Red Klotz," says Toomay. As coach of the Washington Generals, Klotz lost more than 8,000 consecutive games to the Harlem Globetrotters and will go down—and down and down—in history as the anti-Lombardi, a coaching god for whom losing wasn't everything, it was the only thing.

"No matter what you think about Red, you have to admit this," says Toomay. "He was *very* successful at what he did." □



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Scorecard

Edited by Hank Hersch and Mark Bechtel

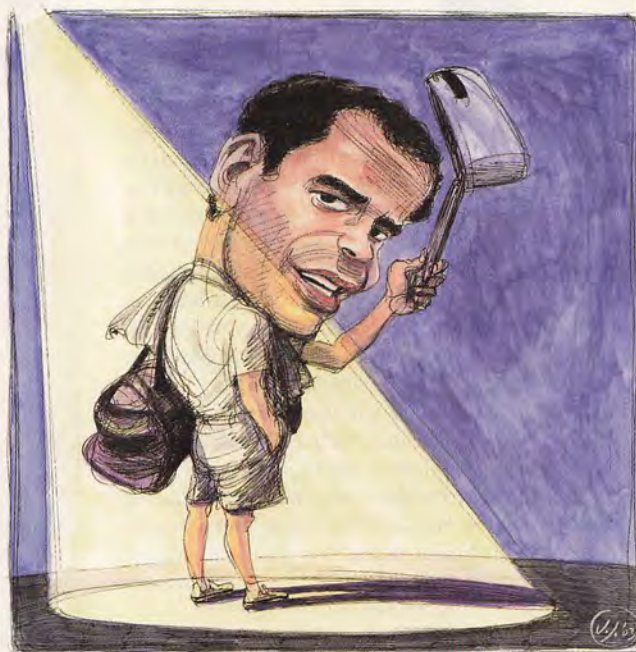
The Man Who Was Too Good

He played his heart out and won a record 14 Grand Slam championships, but nonaficionados never warmed to the genius of Pete Sampras

Lord knows, he kept up his end of the bargain. Ever since Pete Sampras won his first major championship, as a 19-year-old at the 1990 U.S. Open, he did everything a sports hero is supposed to. Not only did he set records, dominate his era and treat opponents and officials with unwavering respect, but he also produced more moments suitable for a hokey storybook than anyone could expect from a man so guarded and shy.

Sampras won the 1995 Australian Open despite weeping on-court over his coach Tim Gullikson's fatal illness, won the '95 Davis Cup final for his country despite being carried off the court two days earlier with sore hamstrings and won the '96 U.S. Open despite being so dehydrated and sick with an upset stomach that he vomited and nearly collapsed. He set a men's Grand Slam record with his 13th title at Wimbledon in 2000, and, of course, in last year's U.S. Open final, he rallied after the two bleakest years of his career to beat arch-rival Andre Agassi—his first finals victim at Flushing Meadow—in the last match of his professional life.

Sampras's run was sublime and surreal, the greatest in the history of men's tennis. And yet, though the cynics held their tongues on Monday, when at 32 he announced his retirement at Arthur Ashe Stadium, for many it was not enough. The curious fact is that Sampras



was hardly beloved. The compliments came with complaints: Sampras didn't sell. Sampras didn't jack ratings. Sampras was too boring, too colorless, too expressionless, too . . . too . . . good.

He was always the argument you couldn't win. Tennis purists loved his skill, naturally, and they will unhesitatingly declare Sampras's second serve, his running forehand and his leaping overhead as treasures that belong under museum glass. But for a public that didn't grow up playing, tennis becomes charismatic only when rackets are flying

or fists are pumping or new ground in fashion is being broken. It doesn't matter that beloved figures like Joe Montana and Tiger Woods have proved themselves duller, colder characters than Sampras; the former competed in a sport America loves and the latter in a game America plays. Sampras arrived when the tennis boom was but a distant echo. His timing was abysmal.

Worse still, in a sound-bite age, he couldn't explain himself. Sampras didn't possess Agassi's glibness and perfect recall of matches; he'd been a tennis prodigy, isolat-

ed from the socializing caldron of high school and to this day has few close friends apart from his wife, Bridget. He spent most of his adult life obscenely rich yet feeling unappreciated, alone with a talent he didn't fully understand. After winning Wimbledon in 1998 to tie Bjorn Borg's record of five titles, he spoke of how "melancholy" the moment made him, of how his greatness seemed to exist wholly apart from his control, of how uncomfortable he was with what he was able to do. No one has been more mystified by Sampras than Sampras himself.

Yet in a world as spun and packaged as professional tennis, all that made for a rare honesty. Growing up, Sampras's role models were blank-faced assassins like Borg and Ken Rosewall and Rod Laver, and he tried carrying himself at a similar remove. But his emotions, his physical lapses embarrassed him. He would hunch over during each crisis, trying to hide with millions of eyes boring into his back.

Sampras had no choice: His body spoke for him, and it never lied. You knew every tear, every illness, every moment on court was true. You knew winning gave him a release he needed nearly as much as breathing. You knew, when it ended on Monday, that he was happy, and that part of him now could never be happy again.

—S.L. Price

Rising Sons

A 'new' Japan rules Little League

Ten minutes after Japan defeated Boynton Beach, Fla., in Sunday's Little League World Series final in Williamsport, Pa., winning pitcher Yuutaro Tanaka stood on home plate, a championship banner wrapped around his 5' 5", 181-pound frame. He mugged for the cameras, he pointed to his parents in the stands, and then he persuaded the members of both teams—23 other 11- and 12-year-olds—to take a victory lap. It was a wonderful Little League moment, the boys jogging together through the cool summer night, but it also underscored a vital point: In this tournament Yuutaro was the player who dictated the action.

"They should name a truck after him," said Boynton Beach manager Ken Emerson of Yuutaro, who fanned 14, allowed only three hits and smacked a titanic home run in Japan's 10-1 victory. "He's very tough."

How good was this team from Tokyo, the third Japanese squad in five years to win the Little League title? It finished the tournament 18-0, outscored its opponents 222-21, and trailed only once (1-0, in the first inning against Curaçao in the international final; Japan won the game 14-6). No Little League team has flexed this much muscle in Williamsport since 1996, when Chinese Taipei crushed Cranston, R.I., 13-3 in the final. "The level of baseball in Japan is continuing to improve," said Japan's manager, Masumi Ohmae. "And this team is particularly strong."



HIGH AND MIGHTY Tanaka (left) threw Florida for a loss.

Yet these Japanese Little Leaguers are different: Unlike their predecessors, they dream of stardom in the States, not their native land. Yuutaro is a case in point. Ever since Hideki Matsui said *sayonara* to the Yomiuri Giants last winter to play in New York, every Yankees game has been shown on Tokyo television, and Yuutaro rarely misses one. Even when the first pitch is thrown at 2 a.m. Tokyo time, he will wake up to watch, then eat breakfast and prepare for school. "My son always talks of wanting to play in the major leagues," says Yuutaro's father, Chitomi.

"Hopefully I will one day face the same pitcher [Florida's Michael Broad] I pitched against tonight in the majors," said Yuutaro through a translator as he walked out of Lamade Stadium late Sunday evening. "But it must be in the United States. This is the place where I want to make it."

—Lars Anderson



GO FIGURE

78 Consecutive batters retired on groundouts, strikeouts or infield putouts by Diamondbacks sinkerballer Brandon Webb, a streak that ended on Sunday when he retired a hitter on a fly ball to the outfield for the first time since Aug. 3.

303,621 Dominoes toppled by Ma Lihua, 24, in an exhibition in Singapore, breaking the 19-year-old world record; Ma put in seven weeks of 13-hour days arranging the dominoes, which took four minutes to fall.

23 Couples who got married at the start-finish line of the Bristol Motor Speedway last Saturday morning, hours before the start of the Sharpie 500.

2 Number of pro sports teams that have gone from last place to having the best record in the league the following season after the WNBA's Detroit Shock matched the turnaround of the Louisville Colonels baseball team of 1890.

\$340,000 Amount Brooklyn catcher Roy Campanella's three NL MVP trophies from the 1950s fetched at auction.

22, 26 Age, in years and days, of Spain's Fernando Alonso when he won Sunday's Hungarian Grand Prix, making him the youngest driver to win a Formula 1 race.

CHUCK SOLOMON (2)



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Scorecard

FOR THE RECORD

Grounded By an outbreak of *Mycoplasma gallisepticum*, a potentially lethal pathogen, Auburn's eagle mascots. Neither Tiger, a 25-year-old golden eagle who performed at the opening ceremonies of the 2002 Winter Olympics, nor Spirit, a three-year-old bald eagle, is healthy enough to carry on the three-year-old ritual of circling Jordan-Hare Stadium before home games; nor is there time to train a new bird for the 2003 season.

Joined The Rainier Beach (Wash.) High football staff as an unpaid assistant, Rick Neuheisel. After being fired from his \$1.5 million-a-year job as coach of the University of Washington for betting on college basketball games, Neuheisel called to offer his services to coach Mark Haley, whom he had come to know during recruiting. Neuheisel attended his first Vikings practice on Aug. 20, one day before he filed a wrongful termination suit against Washington. Though one woman called the high school to complain that his presence ran contrary to "character-building," Neuheisel,

who will work mainly with quarterbacks, told his lawyer after the initial practice that he'd "never had a better day."

Died In what has been ruled a suicide, William Swan, 55, chairman of the board of trustees at St. Bonaventure. After a scandal involving an ineligible basketball player last season led to the resignation of the school president and the firing of the AD and the basketball coach, Swan became despondent. He was found hanging in his basement on Aug. 20. According to a law-enforcement source, Swan, a St. Bonaventure alum and former mascot who spearheaded the school's postscandal review, left a note saying "that he let his colleagues down, that he let the university down and that he apologized to his family."

Banned From flying with the Romanian soccer team on its Aug. 18 trip to Ukraine, photographer Gabriela Arsenie. Romanian superstition holds that it is bad luck for women to travel with the national team. Among other things considered forbidden in the country's soccer circles: the team bus's going in reverse and players' stepping on the field with their left foot first.



Tiger

The Latest

Chanted As if it were 1973 again, "Ali! Ali! Ali!" by a crowd of 9,888 in Biloxi, Miss., last Saturday. What had been billed as the biggest bout in the short history of women's boxing turned out to be a classic Ms.-match. A decade younger and with a 5½-inch edge in reach, Laila Ali knocked out prizefighting pioneer Christy Martin in the fourth round to retain her IBA super middleweight title and run her record to 16-0.

Though she had fought only once in the previous 21 months, the 35-year-old Martin claimed to have trained hard for Ali. "It ticks me off that she rode her father's coattails to get a fight with me," Martin said before the bout. Countered the champ, "Christy has anger-management problems. She's just a white hope. I'll whup her like



ALIGARCHY Like her dad, Laila (left) promised a whupping, then dealt one.

she was my daughter." Good golly, Miss Ali! The whupping was worth \$250,000 to the Greatest's daughter, who plans to fight a few more times, then retire. "I am women's boxing," Ali said. "Most women don't appreciate what I've accomplished. They will when I'm gone." —Franz Lidz

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THE SHOW

BY BILL SCHEFT

Before we begin, be honest: How many of you still think the X Games are a track meet for Larry King's wives?

LEBRON SIGNS \$12 MILLION DEAL TO PROMOTE SPRITE AND POWERADE It's official: If 7-Up is the "Uncola," Sprite is now the UnKobe.

In other NBA news Arvydas Sabonis retired. He will return to Lithuania, where his legs have been living for the last two years.

Tony Massenburg signed with the Sacramento Kings. He's working on his 12th NBA roster. That ties the record held by Chucky Brown and Madonna.

U.S. OPEN UNDER WAY WITHOUT SERENA, VENUS Sad. For the next two weeks, you can find more Williamses at the Alcor Life Extension Foundation.

The USA Network hired Anna Kournikova as a correspondent. Perfect. USA never makes it to the semis, either.

The Open organizers are scrambling to generate interest. The third seed on the ladies' side is Mandy Moore.

And the men's draw is suffering as well. No Sampras, no Funny Cide, no Empire Maker. . .

Meanwhile, Andre Agassi is coming out with his own men's fragrance: Bald Spice.

SACRAMENTO BEE FIRES WRITER FOR COVERING PIRATES-GIANTS GAME "LIVE" OFF TV FROM UNDISCLOSED LOCATION Which raises a serious ethical question: What, you can't get hard liquor at Pac Bell Park?

This guy has no business calling himself a journalist. He should be calling himself a candidate for governor of California.

The writer had been with the *Bee* for 34 years. Maybe it's time to retire and pretend to go to the golf course.

MLB DECISION ON PETE ROSE REIN-STATEMENT TO BE MADE SOMETIME AFTER WORLD SERIES Which is great because his hair dye doesn't expire until Dec. 1.

In other baseball news Albert Pujols sat out his suspension. Unfortunately, he'll have to wait until next season to try and extend his hitting Gary Bennett streak.

Pujols punched Bennett in the face during an altercation on July 13. He was originally suspended two games and three Winston Cup races.

Elsewhere, the Brewers are thinking of closing the upper deck at Miller Park. If they had any sense of humor, they'd stretch a tarp across it with the words LESS FILLING.

NFL IMPLEMENTS PHONE SYSTEM ALLOWING BROADCASTERS TO CALL THE LEAGUE TO CLARIFY RULINGS ON FIELD And for an additional \$4.95 a minute Paul Tagliabue will talk dirty to them.

Wait, it gets better. If the NFL doesn't deliver the ruling in 30 minutes, it's free.

Panthers All-Pro kick returner Michael Bates was acquitted of drunken driving. Apparently, he managed to convince the judge that his weaving was business-related.

PGA CHAMPIONSHIP DRAWS LOWEST RATINGS SINCE 1996 Only six million people watched the final round. Of course, CBS claims there were more viewers, but they were hidden by the rough at Oak Hill.

FORMER MLB COMMISSIONER PETER UEBERROTH ENTERS RACE FOR CALIFORNIA GOVERNOR He's worth \$68 million. Not to mention \$94 million in collusion coverage.

ARIZONA LITTLE LEAGUER HITS THREE HOME RUNS IN ONE GAME And thanks to ESPN, his wife and kids got to see the whole thing live.

My time is up. You've been great. Enjoy Lobo.

Bill Scheft, the head monologue writer for the Late Show with David Letterman, is the author of the novel The Ringer, which is now available in paperback.



Q+A Q & A ANDRE AGASSI

The 33-year-old top seed at this week's U.S. Open is the oldest man to hold the world's No. 1 ranking. He and wife Steffi Graf are expecting their second child in mid-November.

SI: When it comes to the question of your age, are you motivated by defying conventional wisdom?

Agassi: Quite the opposite. At this age I don't want to be doing it. I'm thinking about being at home with the family. But I do find myself challenged. I still feel I can be better, and I still feel like I can win championships. And that needs to exist for me.

SI: What has surprised you about fatherhood?

Agassi: How much I enjoy discovering who my son [22-month-old Jaden Gil] is every day. I truly feel that every day there's something that happens that's a gift and a discovery.

SI: So how many kids are in the ideal plan?

Agassi: I'd say four, but that's from a man without that experience. We'll start with two and go from there.

SI: Do you think a part of your tennis life ended when Pete Sampras officially retired on Monday?

Agassi: Something did end, yes. No athlete is ever guaranteed to have a rivalry no matter how great his career is, and Pete and I had that. It was incredible, so something's gone that can never be recreated.

SI: Does it bother you that you'll never get another shot at him?

Agassi: It bothers me that we'll never get to play again. We played 34 times, and a lot of those were big matches. So it's not that I wish I had another shot at him, it's that we were pushed by each other.

SI: What does your gut say about playing at the U.S. Open in 2004?

Agassi: Something would have to drastically change for me not to be back here.

SI: Tell us what you think will be a typical day in your life 10 years from now?

Agassi: Ideally, I'd love to be spending my day taking care of a lot of children. Picking the kids up from school. Making their lunches. Cooking dinner.

SI: Andre Agassi, Mr. Mom?

Agassi: Well, let's put it this way: I look forward to having that option. —Richard Deitsch



Not his last Open

For more from Andre Agassi, go to si.com/magazine.

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THE WEEK IN **TELEVISION**

AUG. 29–SEPT. 4

SATURDAY 8/30 > FOX 1 PM > Yankees at Red Sox

Time is running out for the Sox to catch New York. After today they'll face the division leaders only four times, including a series a week later in the Bronx.

SATURDAY 8/30 > CBS 6 PM > No. 8 USC at No. 6 Auburn

In his first start as USC's quarterback, sophomore Matt Leinhardt faces the nation's premier linebacking duo of Karlos Dansby and Dontarrious Thomas.

>> **DON'T MISS****SATURDAY 8/30 > ABC 8 PM****No. 17 Washington at No. 2 Ohio State**

With Maurice Clarett out, Huskies quarterback Cody Pickett (page 54) can take the early Heisman lead. But he's never faced a defense like the Buckeyes' (13.1 points per game in 2002).

The D gets an A at OSU

**SUNDAY 8/31 > ABC 12:30 PM > World Track and Field Championships**

The meet wraps up with Morocco's Hicham El Guerrouj attempting to seize his first title in the 5,000 meters one day after the finals in the 1,500—an event he's won three years in a row.

SUNDAY 8/31 > NBC 1 PM > Winston Cup: Southern 500

The return of Jimmy Spencer (back from suspension after slugging Kurt Busch) adds spice to the last Labor Day–weekend race at Darlington.

THURSDAY 9/4 > ABC 8 PM > Jets at Redskins

After Washington's signing of four Jets free agents over the summer, expect New York to make sure everybody is on the return flight from the season opener.

► Why can't we watch Tim Duncan, Tracy McGrady and the rest of the Dream Team make their Olympic qualifying run? The Tournament of the Americas in Puerto Rico isn't being broadcast on network or cable TV—but it's hard to figure who's to blame. Last January, Hector Figueroa, owner of a small San Juan production company, purchased the rights from FIBA, the sports' international governing body, for \$2 million. Last month he said FIBA wanted him to show the games only on pay-per-view; now he insists he tried to resell the rights to cable or network, but no one offered him enough; ESPN, says Figueroa, only wanted this Sunday's final. But ESPN's executive VP of programming and production, Mark Shapiro, denies that's so, adding, "This would have been a huge ratings winner if we could have gotten our hands on it." The bottom line: The tournament is airing only on pay-per-view at \$59.95 for 12 games or \$9.95 for each U.S. game. Figueroa is optimistic he'll make a profit, but for most viewers the tournament is a total loss.

► The No Fun League is becoming a veritable comedy club. First HBO hired sitcom star George Lopez as a rotating entertainment reporter with Wanda Sykes on *Inside the NFL*. Now Fox Sports has announced that Frank Caliendo, a *MAD TV* cast member with a dead-on John Madden impersonation, will take over for Jimmy Kimmel as *Fox NFL Sunday's* game prognosticator and resident funnyman. "I don't do John Madden impressions to be mean," said Caliendo. "I do John Madden impressions to make money." . . . Clip and save: Tennis analysts John McEnroe and Mary Carillo pick Andy Roddick to win his first Grand Slam title at the U.S. Open.

—John O'Keefe

UNDER REVIEW

- Unseen Dream Team
- Funny Business

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SPORTS BEAT

FOLKS WHO think KISS is not popular with the slacks-wearing set should think again. "KISS is my favorite rock group," says PGA champ **Shaun Micheel**, who used to wear the band's black-and-white makeup on Halloween. "I know every one of their songs." The day after he won the PGA, Micheel got a call from his friend **Paco Zimmer**, the band's road manager, inviting him to a show in Columbus, Ohio, on Aug. 19. The 34-year-old Micheel flew from his home in Memphis and met with the band backstage. He also found that he's not as anonymous as he used to be. "Some guy standing next to me between songs said, 'You look just like that guy who won the PGA Championship. And I said, 'That's because I am.' He was like, No way, no way."



Gordon's ex-gal pal?

■ Gentlemen, start your divorce lawyers. The October issue of *Playboy* includes a pictorial and an interview with **Deanna Merryman**, the former cosmetics-counter attendant who claims to have been the cause of **Jeff Gordon's** high-profile split from his wife, **Brooke**. According to

Merryman, she was working at a Neiman Marcus in Palm Beach, Fla., in 2000 when "this little short dude" asked her to lunch, and began an 11-month relationship. (Gordon had no comment on Merryman's claim.) In the story Merryman says, "Jeff became a wild man. He got married when he was 23 and has been on the racetrack since he was a kid. He used to tell me that he never had a chance to have fun."

■ Before he was a Beat writer, **Jack Kerouac** was a beat writer. Well, sort of. He covered sports for *The Lowell Sun* in his hometown of Lowell, Mass., in 1942. He also played running back at Columbia and was a big sports fan. So it's not so odd that the first 1,000 fans at last Thursday's Class A game between the Lowell Spinners and the Williamsport (Pa.) Crosscutters received bobblehead dolls of the author holding a pen and notebook and standing on a copy of *On the Road*. The event was sponsored in part by the English department at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell.



PICTURE THIS

Sometimes you've got to take a stand—by lying down. After being disqualified for a false start in the quarterfinals of the 100 meters at the IAAF World Track and Field Championships in Paris (page 182), **Jon Drummond** staged a flat-out protest for 15 minutes, repeatedly saying, "I did not move." Then, heading to the warmup track, he dunked himself in the water of a steeplechase pit.

■ **Blair Underwood's** new gig, playing Knicks team doctor Robert Leeds on HBO's *Sex and the City*, has several perks. There's the whole making-out-with-**Cynthia Nixon** thing. But Underwood also got to spend a day at Madison Square Garden when the show rented the arena out for a day of shooting. "I got a picture of myself slam-dunking," Underwood said. "Of course, the ladder will be cut out of the photo."

■ In production: *The Game of Their Lives*, based on **Geoffrey Douglas's** 1996 book about the U.S. soccer team, composed primarily of working-class immigrants, that upset mighty England at the 1950 World Cup. The movie will be directed by **David Anspaugh**, who is no stranger to underdog stories—he directed *Rudy*. **Wes Bentley** (*American Beauty*) stars,

but the most intriguing casting decision is **Gavin Rossdale**, who will play English star **Stanley Mortenson**. Rossdale played semipro soc-

cer in England before becoming lead singer of the band Bush. . . . Though sidelined by a back injury, **Anna Kournikova** was still the most visible player in New York City in the days before the U.S. Open. Last Thursday she was in Herald Square helping Microsoft launch XSN, its

THIS WEEK'S SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

Mike Tyson is considering a fight with Bob (the Beast) Sapp, a 6' 4", 375-pound mixed martial artist.

line of sports games for the Xbox. After opening the NASDAQ exchange the next morning, she was in Grand Central Terminal with Amazon.com CEO **Jeff Bezos** peddling her "multiway" sports bra, which will be sold exclusively in the U.S. on Amazon.

<< THEY SAID IT JAMES TONEY

Cruiserweight boxer and write-in candidate for governor of California, on his future plans: "After I knock out Holyfield, it's lights out for Schwarzenegger."





Pictured: TurfGear™ Longsleeve Turtleneck (0032). ©2003 UNDER ARMOUR® Performance Apparel

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Troops In Training

FIRST LT. ANITA ALLEN IS AT THE 2003 PAN AM GAMES, about to start the 3,000-meter run, the final event of the modern pentathlon. Two small problems: It's Aug. 11 in the Dominican Republic—hardly the ideal running climate. And Allen can't see her competitors. They're too far ahead.

In pentathlon, entrants are staggered for the run based on their results in the first four events (shooting, fencing, swimming and riding). Allen, in fifth place, starts 42 seconds and several turns behind the leader.

But Allen, a cross-country and track star at West Point, knows she has energy left. She also has the inspiration of her friend, 1st Lt. Leif Nott, who was killed July 30 in Iraq, and the encouragement she's received in e-mails from soldier friends stationed around the globe. Do it for Leif, they wrote. Do it for all of us.

At the halfway point, Allen catches a first glimpse of the leaders. She's now 17 seconds behind. At stake? The first one to cross the finish line automatically qualifies for the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens.

That's Allen's mission as a soldier in the Army's World Class Athlete Program (WCAP). Established in 1994,

WCAP aims to place servicemen and women on the United States Olympic Team. Currently, 84 soldier-athletes around the country are training in 10 different sports, ranging from taekwondo to track and field. They hope to join the list of 37 WCAP athletes who have become Olympians and the five who have won medals.

WCAP isn't a development program; athletes must prove they're national caliber to qualify for the unit. And it's certainly not a life of leisure: Staff Sgt. Basheer Abdullah, for instance, sends the 14 boxers he coaches out to run at 6:30 a.m. They finish sparring at 10:30 p.m., with several gym sessions in between.

Many athletes, like Allen, are in the Army or Army Reserve when they join WCAP, but others, like Spc. Al Heppner, hear about it as civilians and decide to join the Army. Heppner, a race walker, now credits the military with saving his life.

In February 2000, he was in the lead pack at the Olympic trials for the 50K (31 miles) race walk. Within four miles of the finish, he collapsed with hypothermia. His Olympic hopes shattered, he fell into a debilitating depression for months.

So Heppner, interested in WCAP, enlisted in the Army. Of course, enlistment is followed by basic training. "It was the perfect therapy for me," he says. "I needed someone to yell at me and tell me what to do." (Heppner thereby proved it's possible to start feeling *better* at boot camp.) A few months later he was assigned to WCAP, where he

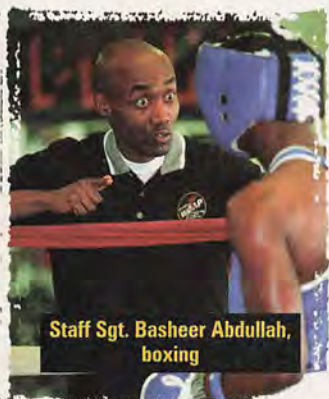
has been training for the 2004 Olympic trials next February.

But Army athletes never forget: They're soldiers first. In between running, lifting weights and going to practice, soldiers maintain their military skills by taking courses or training with a local Army unit. "It's important to realize they're real soldiers," says 1st Sgt. Willie Wilson, who helps run WCAP. "They're not people who join the military, compete in a sport and then get out. They're committed."

That soldiering instinct can cause some doubt when fellow troops are deployed. First Lt. Matthew Smith is a rower based in Princeton, N.J., with the U.S. national team. Before joining WCAP, he trained to be a mechanized infantry officer. If he weren't preparing for the Olympics, he would be "in charge of a platoon of Bradley fighting vehicles in Iraq," he says. Last winter he wondered if WCAP was right for him. "But it is," he says. "My job is to represent the military in rowing. If the Army felt they needed [us] to be doing what we're specialized to do, then we would. But I think we bring a different perspective to the armed forces."

WCAP helps in recruiting and retention, shows to the public that there's more to the Army than defense—and gives soldiers who aren't in the program something to cheer about. "Sometimes I feel like, Gosh, I should be out there with them," Allen says of her West Point classmates in Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan. But they write her with a different message: Anita, keep it up. We're so proud of you. "It makes me want to try even more and work hard and win," she says. "I don't want to let them down."

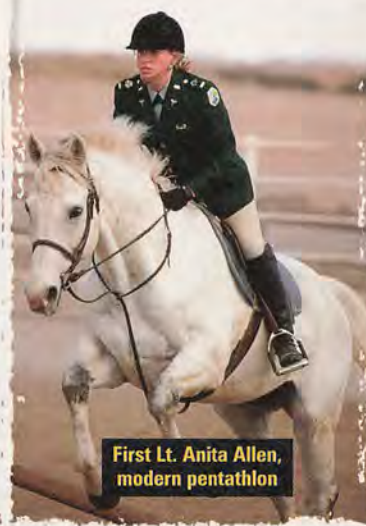
The motivation helps at the Pan Am Games. Inch by inch Allen gains during the run, until she's 15 seconds back ... Ten seconds ... Five. With 400 meters to go, she surges into first then pulls away down the stretch—qualifying her for the Games next year. "When I crossed the line, I was like, Yes! I'm finished," she says. "Then I thought, Wow! I'm most likely going to Athens." Just imagine the e-mails going around the world now.—Sarah Lorge Butler



Staff Sgt. Basheer Abdullah,
boxing



Spc. Al Heppner,
race walk



First Lt. Anita Allen,
modern pentathlon



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Faces in the Crowd

Chris Martin, TULSA
Tennis

Martin, a junior at Illinois, won the men's singles and doubles titles at the Intercollegiate Tennis Association's National Summer championships. He also won the match that gave the Fighting Illini their first NCAA Division I tennis championship.


Deanna Rix, SOUTH BERWICK, MAINE
Wrestling

Deanna, a junior at Marshwood High, won the 119-pound title at the Asica/Vaughan Girls Junior National Wrestling Championships, her third national girls' title this year. Wrestling for the Hawks boys' team this season, she had a 26-5 record.

Bruce McBarnette, STERLING, VA.
Track and Field

McBarnette, 45, a lawyer and part-time actor, jumped 6' 3" to win the high jump (45-and-over division) at the USA National Masters Track & Field Championships, his eighth outdoor title. In April he cleared 6' 4", a world indoor record.


Holly Currie, PISGAH, ALA.
Softball

Currie, a righthanded pitcher and recent graduate of Pisgah High, set state records with 159 wins, 1,730 strikeouts and a career 0.45 ERA. She led the Eagles to their third Class 2A state softball championship and was named tournament MVP for the third time.

Jesse Grabow, SAN RAMON, CALIF.
Bowling

Jesse, 6, a kindergartner at Coyote Creek Elementary, bowled a 232 to win the bantam division at the Northern Junior Bowling Championships. The 38-pound athlete, who uses a 12-pound ball, has a career-high game of 257.


Jenn Campbell, EASTHAMPTON, MASS.
Track and Field

Campbell, a junior at Williams College, ran a meet-record 10:33.67 to win the 3,000-meter steeplechase at the NCAA Division III Outdoor Track and Field Championships. She was named All-New England Small College Athletic Conference.

James Parr, ALBUQUERQUE
Baseball

James, a senior righthander at La Cueva High, hit a grand slam and was the winning pitcher in the Class 5A championship final as the Bears won their first state baseball title. He was named *The Albuquerque Tribune's* Baseball Athlete of the Year.



To submit a candidate for *Faces in the Crowd*, go to si.com/magazine.

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS; CHRIS SMITH/OCEAN EXPOSURE; DAVID DOYLE; TODD VANEK/ST; MICHAEL COLLOPY; DEREK FOWLES PHOTOGRAPHY; JIM THOMPSON

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more than water

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there's more to dehydration than water.
which is why there's more than water to gatorade.





Game of THEIR LIFE

In a state of lacrosse nuts, the diehards battle for glory at the annual **OCEAN CITY CLASSIC**

BY KOSTYA KENNEDY

ALITTLE BEFORE 2 p.m. on the second, sun-scorched day of the Ocean City (Md.) Lacrosse Classic, Joe Road, a 53-year-old contractor from Baltimore, was strapping on his shoulder pads, getting ready to play defense for his club team, Touch of Grey. The name comes from a Grateful Dead song, and when Road founded the team 10 years ago it was apt. But now his hair, like many of his teammates', is mostly white. "We Marylanders have a saying about lacrosse," said Road, just before jogging onto the field. " 'Start early and play forever.' " ¶ At the OC Classic, which

ran from Aug. 14 to Aug. 17 in this, its 10th year, the games started early (the first face-off was at 8:30 a.m.) and went on all day (the last whistle sounded around 10 p.m.). More than 1,000 players, ages 18 to 62, competed through stifling heat and driving rain showers, with the winning teams receiving nothing more than baseball caps and shorts. If you wonder why they

did it, you're not from the Old Line State, where expectant parents buy their kids lacrosse sticks at first sight of a fetal sonogram. "The idea is to have them playing catch before they leave the delivery room," says Casey Connor, a Maryland graduate and defenseman for the Major League Lacrosse Baltimore Bayhawks, who attended the tournament with his pregnant wife, Courtney.

MLL rules forbid Connor and his Bayhawks teammate Gary Gait—lacrosse's



HIGH TIME Sarah Oliphant (front) of Annapolis had a ball in the women's division.

biggest star—from playing in the OC Classic, but the cream of the nonprofessional crop was here. The rosters of the 16 men's and 16 women's elite teams were loaded with current and past NCAA All-Americans from powerhouses such as Johns Hopkins, Maryland, Princeton and Virginia. Résumés in the masters' (35 and older) and grandmasters' (45 and up) divisions listed pro and world-team credentials. Entrants were sponsored by local clubs (e.g., the Baltimore and Mount Washington Lacrosse Clubs), by bars (Baltimore's famous Greene Turtle and Ocean City's M.R. Ducks) and companies (Toyota, Michelob Light).

Play unfolded on five fields. On one, Hopkins midfielder Kyle Harrison, a recent finalist for college player of the year, reeled off an end-to-end rush; on another, last year's top women's collegian, former Georgetown attacker Erin Elbe, whipped





CLOSE RANGE Stephen Berger of Jessup, Md., took his best shot against an elite team that included Baltimoreans Josh Gerber (18), Ryan Lanigan (5) and Brandon Mollett (in goal).

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LARRY FRENCH

in a goal. "Could the elite teams here beat my [Maryland] team?" asked Terrapins coach Dave Cottle, one of the tournament's organizers. "You'd better believe it. You've got college all-stars on teams with club players, who can be even better. They're more filled out and more experienced than college guys. And they've still got their wheels."

Yet the beauty of the Ocean City tournament, in which some 85% of the players were from Maryland, lay not in the dazzling displays of stickhandling but rather in the mosaic of characters, old and young, male and female, bound together by their love of a game and by what more than a few call "a way of life." They were all somewhere on their path as lacrosse lifers: teachers, doctors, bankers and restaurateurs. Many had gathered the entire family and come out for a few days of ball.

Meet Gavin Stringer, 53, a Touch of Grey midfielder and an investment officer from Baltimore who had not one, not two but five children—two sons, a daughter, two stepdaughters—playing in the tournament. The family bunked together in a condo near the fields, careful to label their sticks. Stringer, who has had two knee operations, talked about his "unexplainable and undying attachment" to the game. His daughter, Courtney, a goalie at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, said, "What can you really say? We're lacrosse junkies."

Meet Chad Unitas, 25, son of the greatest of all Maryland athletes, playing for the Kislings Lacrosse Club in the elite division.

Meet the Captain Pete's women's team, blinding opponents with their tie-dyed uniforms.

And meet Rich Evans, a Baltimore Realtor, a defenseman for the Stingers' bar team and the oldest player in the tournament. Evans starred at Gilman School in Baltimore, was a standout at Virginia and played for 15 years with the Mount Washington club team, which often went undefeated for seasons at a time. Let the record show that at 62, Evans still hauls ass. "I'm here to see guys I've known for 40 years," he said in Ocean City. "They remember big hits I made in the '60s and '70s. We talk about old games at Navy or wherever, and at the same time we're still doing it. The other day was perfect: We played our game, and then a bunch of us stayed in the park-

ing lot drinking beers until past midnight. That's what it's about."

Lacrosse is a movable feast, and moving it to Ocean City—a beach community just a couple of hours from Baltimore and Annapolis—was the brainchild of Jim Huelskamp, a former Salisbury State and pro indoor lacrosse standout. Huelskamp's enthusiasm makes him the Ernie Banks of lacrosse, but instead of let's play two, he wants to play four, then play four again the next day. In the summer of 1995 Huelskamp was 31, his pro career had ended and his

and National Hall of Fame—is one reason why these days "you can't walk more than a few blocks in Baltimore or Annapolis without seeing a lacrosse net in someone's driveway," says Joe Gold, U.S. Lacrosse's director of special events. The sport has roots in other parts of the country, Long Island and upstate New York in particular, but nothing compares with Maryland, where high school lax games draw as many as 5,000 fans. When the University of Maryland hosted the NCAA Final Four at M&T Bank Stadium in May, 37,944 came out for the

Marylanders have been looking for places and excuses to play lacrosse since the 1880s, when Johns Hopkins first fielded a team.



STICKING IT TO 'EM Ocean City's Zach DiFilippo outmaneuvered the nine-and-under Salisbury club.

lacrosse jones raged something fierce. He appealed to a couple of fellow Salisbury alumni, Cottle and Greene Turtle owner Steve Pappas, for funding. "Then I just got on the phone, called everyone I knew and said, 'We're having a lacrosse tournament,'" says Huelskamp, who ran (and, of course, played in) the first OC Classic and slept in a pup tent near the fields.

There were eight teams that first year. It wasn't long before the teams multiplied and the women's and masters' and grandmasters' were born. "Everyone just wants it," says Huelskamp. "Even teams that lose every game every year keep coming back."

Marylanders have been looking for places and excuses to play lacrosse since the 1880s, when Johns Hopkins first fielded a team. The school's unceasing allegiance to the sport—it is home to the Lacrosse Museum

and final despite heavy rains, obliterating the previous attendance record of 26,229.

Participants outnumbered fans at Ocean City, and the atmosphere on the field was intense. Players screamed at officials and chastised teammates who didn't hustle. "We're all family," said Danny Hart, 26, owner of the Kislings Tavern & Grill and president of its team. "We love to get together for beers, but when you put your lid on and go out there it's serious. We're playing for bragging rights, and after college that's just about everything."

The final rights were settled when Annapolis-based Single Source Solution played Baltimore-based Laxworld Dewalt for the men's elite title. The crowd (girlfriends, family members, other players) cheered and jeered the finer points of the game, while kids worked as ball boys and dogs loped along the sidelines. After Source had won, 12-8, the team members gathered at midfield to get their caps and shorts from Huelskamp. When they broke from their final huddle with a celebratory whoop—"This is like our national title," said Source attackman Dudley Dixon—some tossed the hats in the air, graduation-day-style.

As the crowd filed away, many stopped to shake Huelskamp's hand. "Thank you," they'd say, "this was great." His face shone as one big grin. "All right!" he kept saying. "We'll see you next summer." □

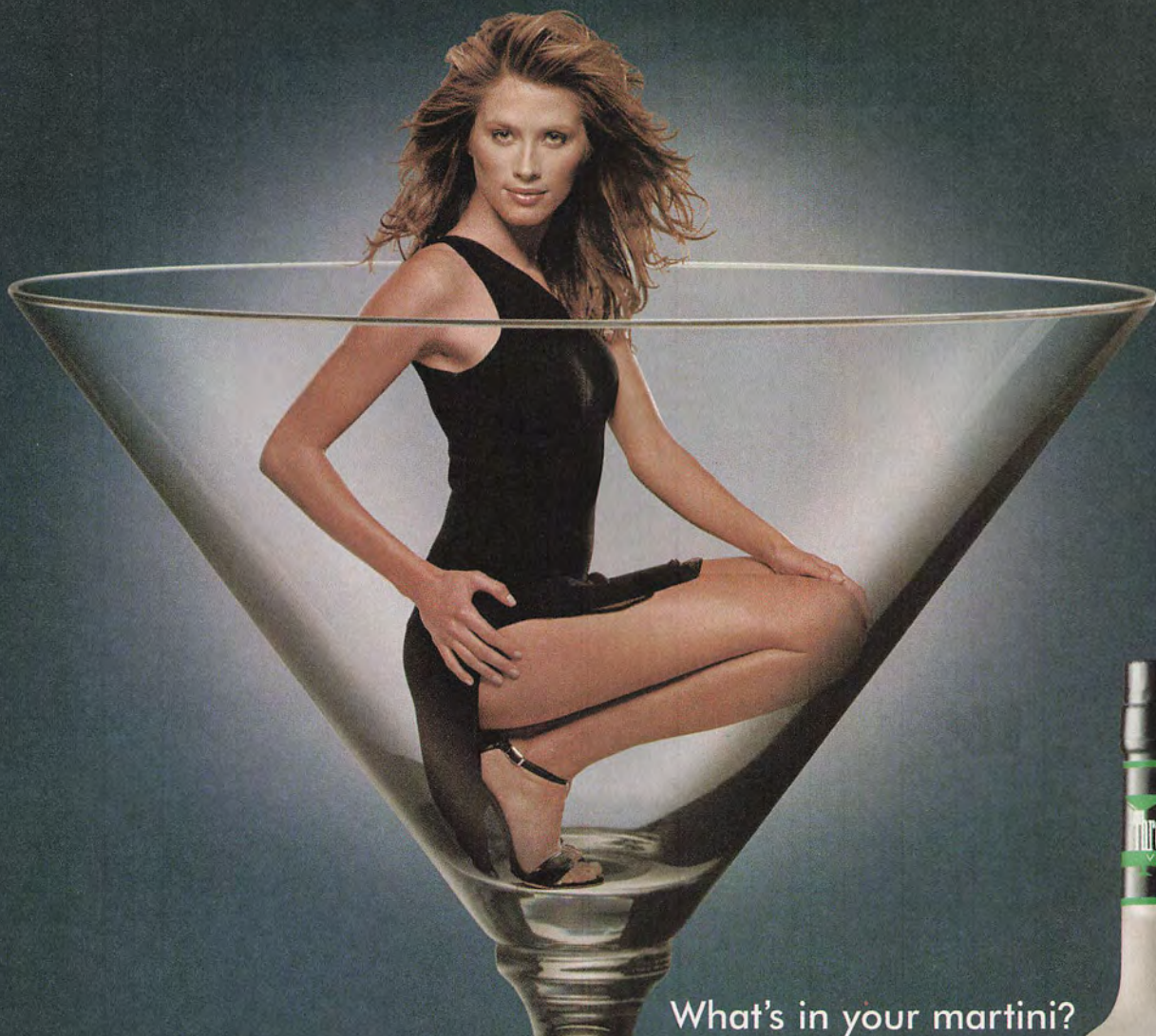
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Jousting, Anyone?

Before the glory of Unitas and Ripken, Maryland was a big-time sports wasteland

BY FRANK DEFORD

MY FATHER WAS born in Maryland in 1902. He enjoyed sports but wasn't much of a fan. You could understand this about any Marylander who lived there in the first half of the 20th century. It was slim pickings if you were interested in championship sports played by human beings. Indeed, it is hard to imagine any state so populous and well located, possessing one of the largest cities in the nation, that had less big-time sport than Maryland did. ¶ It is true that horses were something else again. (Would it surprise you to learn that the state's official sport is jousting?) Maryland, which is, geographically, the ninth-smallest state, had nine racetracks, strategically located, which meant that no Marylander was ever far from a

\$2 window. I combined my own budding journalism career with sports by leaving Baltimore's Gilman School early to take the school newspaper pages to the printers, in Pimlico, and then sneaking over to catch some races at the track. There, at Pimlico, the Preakness gave the state its one day a year in the sporting sun.

Maryland's sports life started to go to hell a few months after Daddy was born. The Baltimore Orioles had been America's most sensational team in the 19th century, but in the fall of '02 the franchise was Irsayed to New York, becoming the Highlanders (although they would subsequently earn somewhat more renown as the Yankees). Baltimore did get a franchise in the short-lived Federal League in 1914-15. But the only significant thing the Terrapins (47-107 in '15) accomplished was to sue when the Fed folded, which got the Supreme Court to declare, inscrutably, that baseball was not interstate business and, thus, should own an antitrust exemption. Sure, good for Judge Landis then and Bud Selig now, but Maryland was left with nothing but the bushes.

Poor Maryland didn't even have much in the way of college sports. The University of Maryland had a football team whose main claim to fame was that the coach, Curley Byrd, got promoted to school president. Wow! That kind of thing never even happened in pigskin provinces like Alabama or Nebraska.

Of course, if you are familiar with geography, you know that there's a rectangular area that was carved out of Maryland's hide. Quaintly known as the District of Columbia, it had two major league teams, the Senators and the Redskins. Nonetheless, even though these teams cavorted just over the state line, gen-u-wine Marylanders hated them because they



owned territorial rights and kept the bigs out of Baltimore. Don't go there!

So, with no games worth seeing, most everybody in the state who was not playing the Daily Double went "downashore" and fished or crabbled.

Then overnight it all changed. Suddenly Maryland got major league teams galore (and, ha-ha, better than Washington's!), champions and heroes. In a real way—if more spectacularly—what happened to Maryland was the model for what would happen

to so many other disparate states that would be knighted with big-time sports as the century wore on.

My gracious, it happened fast. In '47 Baltimore got a team in the Basketball Association of America (forerunner to the NBA), and the next spring the Bullets won Maryland's first title in anything since the 1896 Orioles' National League crown. Then a Dixie sharpie named Sunny Jim Tatum, recruiting in the Pennsylvania coal-mining towns, made the Terps into a football power—the 1953 national champs! And next: Johnny U and the Colts! Brooks and the Birds! Camden Yards, the most influential sports structure ever built!

I think it's safe to say that Daddy died happy, knowing that old meanie Washington, having lost the Senators, couldn't get back into major league baseball without first kissing up to Baltimore. What goes around. . .

All right, there were a few bumps in the road, but if the Bullets left for Deecee and the Colts for Indianoplace, Maryland stole the Browns from Ohio and named them in honor of a drunken poet who had, felicitously, died in Baltimore, and the Ravens won a Super Bowl. The Preakness got even bigger. And the Terps finally won a basketball title to kick off the 21st century. Also, downashore, there's still lots of fishing and crabbing. □

Senior contributing writer Frank Deford grew up in Baltimore.



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The Poll

Marylanders weigh in on sports*

Favorite major league baseball team:

Baltimore Orioles....49%
New York Yankees...14%
Philadelphia Phillies.5%

Favorite NFL team:

Washington Redskins.27%
Baltimore Ravens...25%
Dallas Cowboys.....6%

Favorite NBA team:

Washington Wizards..21%
Los Angeles Lakers.10%
No favorite.....39%

Favorite NHL team:

Washington Capitals.34%

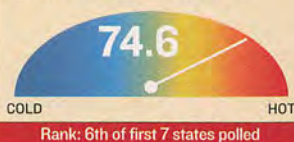
Philadelphia Flyers...3%
No favorite.....44%

Favorite college team:

Maryland basketball..26%
Maryland football....15%
Penn State football...4%

Enthuse-o-meter

On a scale of 1 to 100, how would you rate your state's enthusiasm for sports, relative to other states?†



Greatest athlete who lived in or played for a team in your state:

Cal Ripken Jr.....31%
Johnny Unitas.....30%

State's biggest rivalry:

Ravens-Redskins....18%
Redskins-Cowboys..16%
Maryland-Duke.....12%
Maryland-Johns Hopkins (lacrosse)..10%

Favorite announcer:

John Madden.....16%
Chuck Thompson.....11%
John Miller.....9%

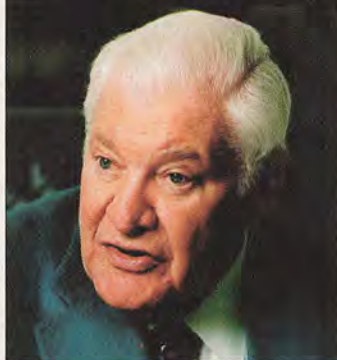
More a fan of college or pro sports?

Pro.....60%
College.....15%
Equal.....25%

Favorite sports to watch on TV†

Football.....82%
Winter Olympics....55%
Summer Olympics...51%
Baseball.....47%
Basketball.....46%

ENEMY OF THE STATE



Bob Irsay.....16%
Peter Angelos.....15%
George Steinbrenner...12%

The late owner who moved the Colts to Indianapolis in 1984 barely beat the owner who has presided over the Orioles' recent decline. As their most hated opponent, Marylanders chose the Dallas Cowboys (27%), New York Yankees (22%) and Duke (17%).

WHO & WHERE

1 Hagerstown Suns

The Class A affiliate of the Giants recently gave away a free funeral as a fan promotion.

2 Howard County

The athletic-minded county (slogan: Get up, get out and get active) is the SI Sportstown for having Maryland's best community sports programs.

3 Cal Sr.'s Yard

When completed in 2005, the Aberdeen complex, created by Cal Ripken Jr. and his family to honor his dad, will be the nation's finest youth-baseball facility and include a 3,500-seat version of Camden Yards.

4 Brian Jordan

The Dodgers outfielder and former NFL defensive back was a three-sport star at Milford Mill High in Baltimore.

5 Sam Cassell

The Timberwolves guard, an alum of Baltimore's Dunbar High, won NBA titles with Houston in 1994 and '95.

6 Pam Shriver

The Baltimore native won 22 Grand Slam doubles titles and the 1988 Olympic doubles gold medal.

7 Oriole Park at Camden Yards

Opened in 1992, the throwback stadium has inspired a slew of cities to erect baseball-only facilities to revive downtrodden areas. The Orioles have averaged 3.3 million fans, up from 2.5 million in their final season at Memorial Stadium.

8 Michael Phelps

The 18-year-old Baltimorean holds three world swimming records and has a shot at six gold medals at the 2004 Games.

15 Steve Francis

The Rockets' All-Star point guard and former Maryland star never started as a high schooler in Silver Spring.

16 Shawn Springs

The Silver Spring native, drafted No. 3 overall in 1997, has 19 picks in six seasons with the Seahawks.

17 DeMatha Catholic High School

Under basketball coach Morgan Wootten (1,274 wins from 1956 through 2002), the Hyattsville school won five mythical national titles and produced a dozen NBA players, including Adrian Dantley, Danny Ferry and Joe Forte.

18 Denny Neagle

The Rockies lefthander and two-time National League All-Star grew up in Gambrills.

10 Juan Dixon

In 2002 the guard from Baltimore led Maryland to its first NCAA basketball title; he now plays for the Wizards.

11 Antonio Freeman

The former Packer and Eagle from Polytechnic High in Baltimore led the NFL in receiving yards in 1998.

12 Jousting Championship

The official sport of Maryland has crowned its last three state champs in Tuckahoe State Park near Ridgely; riders use their lances to spear small, dangling rings, not opponents.

HOT SPOT

128th Preakness Stakes



9 Pimlico Race Course

The 133-year-old Baltimore track is the nation's second oldest (after New York's Saratoga) and has hosted the Preakness—the second jewel of the Triple Crown—since 1873.

Start of the 2003 Preakness



ALAN AMECHE'S GAME-WINNING TD EARNED HIM A RIDE OFF THE FIELD AND THE COLTS THE '58 NFL TITLE.

GREATEST MOMENT

What event could top The Greatest Game Ever Played? The Colts' thrilling 23-17 overtime victory over the New York Giants in the 1958 NFL Championship Game, in Yankee Stadium, gave Baltimore its first league title, made a hero of 25-year-old quarterback Johnny Unitas and launched pro football on its rise to the pinnacle of American sports.

NUMBERS

21 Duckpin bowling alleys in Baltimore, where the sport was invented in the 1890s; Maryland had 106 alleys during duckpin's heyday in the mid-1960s.

31-0 Record of the 1982-83 Dunbar High basketball team in Baltimore, for which Muggsy Bogues and Reggie Williams started and Reggie Lewis was a backup.

300 Members of the Baltimore Marching Ravens, the largest band for an NFL team.

10,000 Cubic yards of broken-up concrete from Baltimore's razed Memorial Stadium that were used last year to build an oyster reef in Chesapeake Bay.

ALLTIME BEST

For Maryland's top 50 homegrown sports figures, go to SI.com/50

Babe Ruth, Baseball player

The Baltimore-born Bambino changed the game. Before Ruth, the season record for home runs was 27; he hit 60 in 1927 and 714 in his career with the Yankees, Red Sox and Braves. As a pitcher he was 94-46 with a 2.28 ERA.



Jimmie Foxx, Baseball player

One of the great power hitters after Ruth, he hit 500 homers by age 33, including 58 for the Philadelphia A's in 1932. The Sudlersville native won the Triple Crown in '33. His drinking finally caught up with him; he retired with 534 home runs.

Cal Ripken Jr., Baseball player

A testament to perseverance, he played in a record 2,632 consecutive games from 1982 to '98 for the Orioles. The 6'4" shortstop from Aberdeen also revolutionized his position, hitting 431 homers.



Al Kaline, Baseball player

The rightfielder from Baltimore was a model of consistency for the Tigers for 22 seasons. In 1955, at age 20, he hit .340, becoming the youngest AL batting champion. He also had a superb throwing arm and won 10 Gold Gloves.

Lefty Grove, Baseball player

Maybe the greatest lefthanded pitcher ever, Grove was the ace of the pennant-winning Philadelphia Athletics from 1929 to '31. Born in Lonaconing, Grove won a record nine AL ERA titles and finished with a career record of 300-141.



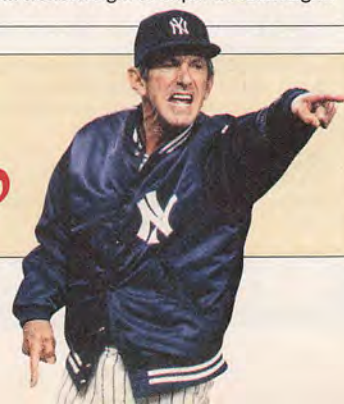
Sugar Ray Leonard, Boxer

The charismatic Leonard (36-3-1) was one of the best boxers of the modern era. The Palmer Park pugilist won gold at the 1976 Olympics and later earned world titles in five divisions, from welterweight to super middleweight.

MEMORABLE QUOTE

“Baltimore's such a lousy town, Francis Scott Key went out in a boat to write *The Star-Spangled Banner*.”

—BILLY MARTIN, NEW YORK YANKEES MANAGER (AND BERKELEY, CALIF., NATIVE), 1978



AP (AMECHE SCORING); NY PRESS (INSET); CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: WILLIAM C. GREENE/SIPA/CON SM (RUTH); AP (FOXX); LEE BALTENMAN (KALINE); JOHN IACONO (CLONARD); AP (GROVE); WALTER IODISS JR. (RIPKEN); CHUCK SOLOMON (MARTIN).

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MARYLAND

CHARLOTTE REARDON/Olney

BEFORE SHE SETTLED ON RUNNING, Charlotte Reardon tried many other sports: basketball, soccer... You name it. "But I'm not very coordinated," the recent Good Counsel High School graduate confesses with a laugh, "so it didn't really work out. One day my friend said, 'We'll just do running. You can't get cut from the team.' I didn't even get a jersey."

During her first track season, as a sophomore, Reardon could barely break 20 seconds in the 100 meters. She suffers from cystic fibrosis, a life-threatening respiratory disease that also affects the digestive system. She has asthma as well—not the ideal makeup for a sprinter. But her parents and doctors encouraged her to continue, knowing that running could help her breathe better.

After overcoming stress fractures as a junior, she found her stride in cross-country and middle-distance track events. The more she ran, the less she felt CF's effects, and hospital visits that once came often dwindled to nearly none.

Reardon became Good Counsel's true captain, rallying teammates for "fun runs" and handing out Gatorades she had adorned with motivational quotations. "I've never met a kid who spreads as much love," coach Tom Arnold says. Behind her leadership, Good Counsel won track and cross-country conference titles last school year. She finished

second at that cross-country meet and plans to continue running this fall at the University of Rochester.

Selfless and self-deprecating, Reardon wondered why newspapers wanted to tell her story. Then she got a grateful letter from the mother of a CF patient. Reardon isn't just spreading love. She's spreading hope.—*Alec Morrison*



Reardon's runs help her combat CF.



S. CAROLINA

JERRIN WATSON/Gilbert

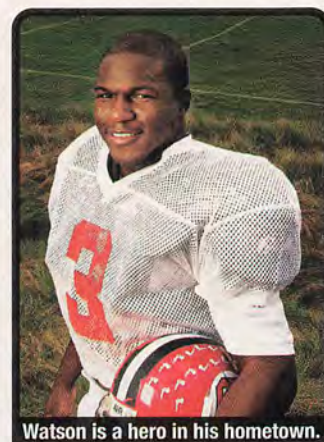
AFTER A GAME LAST SEASON, GILBERT High School football star Jerrin Watson was talking to local fans when a toddler waddled over and inspected his sweaty equipment. Watson didn't hesitate. He put his pads and jersey on the wide-eyed boy. "And that kid lit up like the Fourth of July," says Sissie

Wall, Watson's seventh grade teacher and mentor.

The 19-year-old Watson, who joins the football team at Newberry College this fall, is a hero in Gilbert, and not just because the all-state back ran for 1,467 yards and 14 touchdowns, leading GHS to the AA playoffs. He spent time with younger teammates off the field, coached baseball clinics and routinely arrived two hours before basketball games to take pictures with kids. "It's great that they want to be like me," the three-sport star says. "They're pushing themselves to work as hard as I have."

Watson, who has studied diligently to overcome a learning disability, used to be rambunctious in class. But Wall saw his potential and gave him extra attention during and after school. He has since blossomed academically—last year he penned a story per day to improve his writing skills. The oldest of four siblings in a single-parent household, he's had added responsibilities at home too, helping his three sisters get ready for school and holding two summer jobs.

Watson takes pleasure in being a role model in his tight-knit community. He works one-on-one with middle school football players and attends the Little League games of his biggest fans. "The five-, six-year-olds, they look up to him," GHS baseball coach Ashley Burnett says. "They all know who Jerrin Watson is. That's a special relationship for a high school kid to have."—*Eric Seideman*



Watson is a hero in his hometown.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE REARDON FAMILY (LEFT); KIM KIM FOSTER/THE STATE

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Date

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**Sports
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Beware THE BATS

Powered by **Javy Lopez**, who's having a record-setting season for a catcher, Atlanta is winning not with pitching but with hitting

BY DANIEL G. HABIB

JAVY LOPEZ is eager to set the record straight. A visitor to the Atlanta Braves' clubhouse at Pac Bell Park has just recounted to Lopez a story told by his teammate Andruw Jones about an afternoon the two spent, two or three years ago, flying one of Lopez's radio-controlled model airplanes. According to Jones, an aerial maneuver went awry, and the plane entered a tailspin and crashed into a wall of trees, forcing the pair to scour the woods for the fallen aircraft. Lopez, an avid flyer, and a proud one, shakes his head. "No, no. What happened was, the battery fell out, and once it comes out, you've got no control over the plane," he says. "So it started spinning and hit the ground, near some trees. It's not like I crashed it in the woods." ¶ This pilot knows the difference between a nasty fall and a true crash and burn. After two seasons of decline, the 32-year-old Lopez is savoring a career year and has become the unlikely



BOB ROSATO

COMING BACK After a two-year slump, Lopez is the unlikely leader of a lineup aimed at home run history.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERT BECK

engine of Atlanta's big old jet airliner, the most powerful offense in the National League. Through Sunday the Braves had blitzed to the best record in baseball (84-46) and a 13½-game lead in the NL East. They've done it not, as has been their signature since the early 1990s, with otherworldly starting pitching (theirs has been average this year), but with their bats. The sight of Atlanta's potent offense—tied for first in the majors in home runs (197) and second in runs per game (5.7) and slugging percentage (.479)—covering for a scuffling starting staff produces a striking frisson of unfamiliarity.

With a 3-4-5 so formidable that Lopez hits seventh in the batting order (outfielders Gary Sheffield, Chipper Jones and Andruw Jones have combined for 86 homers and a .935 OPS), the Braves have reimagined themselves as bruisers. Atlanta has a shot at the NL single-season team home run record (249, by the 2000 Houston Astros). And with Lopez (34 homers at week's end), Sheffield (33), Andruw Jones (31), Chipper Jones (22) and Vinny Castilla (21), the Braves could finish with a major-league-record five 30-homer hitters.

At week's end Lopez had homered once every 11.71 plate appearances, more frequently than any player besides the San Francisco Giants' limitless Barry Bonds (11.67), and he was on pace to tie the single-season record for home runs by a catcher (41, by Todd Hundley), even though he had only 398 plate appearances, five short of the minimum to qualify for the batting title (*chart, right*). He also led major league catchers in batting average (.326), slugging percentage (.668), extra-base hits (54) and RBIs (85). "Javy's been absolutely awesome," says Atlanta manager Bobby Cox. "We knew he'd hit better than last year, but nobody could envision this. It's gotten to the point where he pops up and you almost get pissed off because you're expecting another home run."

Lopez's resurgence not only follows the worst season of his nine-year career (.233, 11 homers), but also arrives at an age that typically transforms power-hitting catch-



LESS IS MORE Dropping 35 pounds has helped Lopez ward off the wear and tear of life behind the plate.

his native Ponce, Puerto Rico, he dieted meticulously and added a speed-training regimen to his workout program, dropping 35 pounds from his 6' 3" frame and reporting to spring training at 210, his current playing weight. "I decided to do something different with my life, my body," he says.

At 245 pounds Lopez had grown sluggish as each season wore on and innings behind the plate mounted; his career batting average of .255 in August was his worst in any month. A decade of lavish postgame spreads had accustomed Lopez to heavy late-night meals, so he began his new regimen by cutting back on carbohydrates in the evenings and instead snacked on low-fat popcorn and, in Jared-like fashion, turkey sandwiches from Subway. Working with trainers in both Atlanta and Ponce, Lopez did cardiovascular work three afternoons a week, short runs and sprints, high-jumped through a maze of bungee cords and pulled tires, all with the aim of shedding weight.

Still, Lopez did not immediately display his career-year form. He struggled early, batting .227 with four homers over his first 24 games, and missed five days with a strained left hamstring in late April. Always susceptible to becoming pull-conscious, Lopez was jumping at pitches and letting his head and lead shoulder fly open as he swung. "Even before the ball was to the catcher, my shoulder was open," he says, "which made every pitch I saw almost unhittable."

Even a splashy two-homer, six-RBI performance in front of his father, Jacinto, and a partisan hometown crowd in a 14-8 win against the Montreal Expos in San Juan on April 17 proved only a momentary blip. While mulling over remedies in mid-May, Lopez thought of Matt Williams, the former Giants, Cleveland Indians and Arizona Diamondbacks slugger who retired in June. A righthanded power hitter with a similar build, Williams had a habit of touching the

POWER PLAY

JAVY LOPEZ is on pace for two records: the single-season home run mark for catchers (he has hit all but one of his 34 homers while playing behind the plate) and the record for home runs by a player who fell short of qualifying for a batting title (the minimum is 3.1 plate appearances per game—502 in a full season). Lopez's .326 average at week's end would rank sixth in the NL, but his 398 plate appearances fell five short of qualifying.

MOST HOME RUNS BY A CATCHER

PLAYER, TEAM	SEASON	HRs
Javy Lopez, Braves	2003	41*
Todd Hundley, Mets	1996	41
Mike Piazza, Mets	1999	40
Mike Piazza, Dodgers	1997	40
Roy Campanella, Dodgers	1953	40

MOST HOME RUNS BY NONQUALIFIERS FOR THE BATTING TITLE

PLAYER, TEAM	SEASON	PA	HRs
Javy Lopez, Braves	2003	494*	42*
Hank Aaron, Braves	1973	465	40
Bob Horner, Braves	1980	495	35
Rudy York, Tigers	1937	417	35
Barry Bonds, Giants	1999	434	34

*Projected / Compiled by David Sabino and the Elias Sports Bureau

ers into 98-pound weaklings. Because the physical demands of catching—the accumulated fatigue on top of everyday bumps, bruises and busted thumbs—are often responsible for that decline, his revival is evidence that Lopez is in the best shape of his life. During an off-season split between homes in Atlanta's Buckhead district and

point of his chin to his left shoulder in his stance; Lopez began doing the same thing. To encourage patience at the plate, Lopez began positioning his hands back in his stance, parallel to his right ear when he expected fastballs and farther back, behind the ear, when he was sitting on breaking balls. He immediately found himself with more time to be selective. Says Braves hitting coach Terry Pendleton, "The biggest thing is, he started swinging at strikes. When he wasn't hitting last year, he was chasing bad pitches."

Lopez also began reducing his live batting practice—initially to conserve energy on sweltering Hotlanta afternoons—and soon found that less BP meant better

Things are going so swimmingly that Lopez, not normally the superstitious type, has, like Sheffield, taken to wearing the same undershirt every day: Though Lopez claims the '70s and '80s power-ballad band Boston as his favorite, he now sports a black Aerosmith muscle shirt, a gift from a flight attendant on a team charter earlier this season. When informed that the band once co-owned a Boston nightclub, Mama Kin, in the shadow of the Green Monster, Lopez muses for a moment. "Next year we play there. I might check it out," he says, then reconsiders. "Next year, I don't know if I'll still be with this team."

There's the rub: Lopez's well-timed season has likely priced him out of Atlanta.

Lopez also wants to begin splitting time between catcher and first base, a desire he'll make clear to interested clubs this winter. "I want to start saving my body, where I can get a lot more at bats and last longer," he says.

When retirement does beckon, Lopez will fill his days by flying his model planes. "If he had his choice, he'd be playing with airplanes every day," says Serge Lavigne, president of the Cobb County Radio Control Modelers Club, of which Lopez is a member. Growing up middle class in Ponce, Lopez enviously remembers friends and neighbors flying model airplanes. "I used to love watching them, but I never had the money to do it myself," he says.

"At least 30 of [his homers] have been *no doubt*," Fick says of Lopez. **YOU'VE GOT TO COMPARE IT TO A BONDS, SOSA OR MCGWIRE."**

swings in games. "BP would screw up my swing," he says. "There are a lot of people watching BP, and you want to make things fun, right? Are you going to work on your swing, hit balls the opposite way? No, you want to hit the ball over the fence. Then you come into the game trying to jack the ball out of the park on every swing." Now Lopez usually hits only before the first game of each series and does soft-toss drills indoors with third base coach Fredi Gonzalez on other days.

The result has been the most prolific power stretch by a catcher in recent memory. Since his April 17 fireworks in San Juan, Lopez had 33 home runs in 349 trips to the plate, one every 10.6 plate appearances, including a major-league-high eight multihomer games. "It's been bombs away, and I mean bombs away," says Atlanta first baseman Robert Fick. "He's got what, 34? At least 30 of them have been *no doubt*, right off the bat. I've never seen anything like it. You've got to compare it to a Bonds or Sosa or McGwire." Although his aggregate numbers don't rival those three (as a catcher, he misses substantially more games), Lopez's success ratio does. In '01, when Bonds hit 73 homers, he went deep once every 9.1 plate appearances; in '98, when McGwire hit 70, he did so once every 9.7 and Sosa (66 homers) once every 10.9.



THE AIR UP THERE Lopez, has dreamed of flying model planes since he was a boy. "It makes you find peace," he says.

After earning \$6 million in the walk year of a two-year, \$13 million contract, Lopez is due a raise and a multiyear deal. It's not likely he'll get that from the Braves, who were forced to trade ace righthander Kevin Millwood for budgetary reasons last December. And in 27-year-old Johnny Estrada (.327, nine homers and 65 RBIs in 105 games with Triple A Richmond), obtained from the Phillies for Millwood, Atlanta has a future catcher at a cut-rate cost. "I got no clue," Lopez says of next season. "The kind of year I'm having, the good thing is that I know I'll find a job somewhere."

"It's a pretty expensive hobby." Five years ago Lopez was a budding aficionado, building and flying smaller planes. Now the pride of his 12-plane collection is an Extra 260 with a 105-inch wingspan, 102 cubic centimeter engine and 28-inch propeller. From nose to tail it stands several feet taller than a man. "A beast," smiles Lopez. "I've only flown it once because you need a big area, and it was only finished right before spring training."

During the off-season Lopez flies every other weekend, either in Puerto Rico or at the CCRC's airstrip in Acworth, Ga. That facility boasts a 400-foot paved runway that three years ago Lopez paid \$5,000 to help build. From April to October, Lopez must content himself with puttering a small electric plane around Turner Field or its parking lots, or practicing on a computer flight simulator, but he craves the long, solitary hours of flight. "I compare it to fishing," he says, adding that he'd like to start entering flight competitions once he retires. "Once you go out there and start fishing, it's like you're out of the world, you're concentrating on something. It makes you find peace."

The tranquility will come. There are two months of turbulence left for the Braves, and the man who's making them fly. □

ON SATURDAYS He's No Cowboy

Rugged Washington quarterback **Cody Pickett**, the son of a rodeo star, has a chance to lasso the Heisman. But first, bring on the Buckeyes

BY PHIL TAYLOR

HE CAN saddle a horse as easily as you start your car, he has roped steers on the professional rodeo circuit, and his name sounds like a character out of a Kevin Costner Western, but Washington senior quarterback Cody Pickett looks nothing like a cowboy. Pickett emerged from the Huskies' locker room after a recent practice sporting a New York Yankees cap perched at a fashionable angle, a patch of beard on his chin and a silver necklace thick enough to double as a bike lock. He looked more like a rapper than a roper. ¶ It was not the appearance one would expect of

someone with Pickett's background, which is exactly the way he wants it. He has no interest in feeding city slickers' stereotypes. "He's a cowboy, but he doesn't advertise it," says senior linebacker Greg Carothers. "You couldn't tell it from the clothes he wears or most of the music he listens to, but put a rope in his hands and he's a cowboy."

Like those of any colorful western hero, Pickett's exploits are well-known to the folks back home, in his case tiny Caldwell, Idaho. Pickett grew up the son of a rodeo star on Chicken Dinner Road and excelled in football and rodeo before arriving in 1999 at Washington, where he has won over the Huskies faithful with his toughness. Washington fans are still talking about the game against Arizona during Pickett's sophomore year in which he not only played with a separated right (throwing) shoulder but also threw for a school-record 455 yards and scored the winning

touchdown by diving between two tacklers into the end zone. "I once had a quarterback who sat out five weeks with the same injury," says Huskies coach Keith Gilbertson, the team's offensive coordinator for three years before taking over for the fired Rick Neuheisel this summer.

There is a touch of urban to Pickett's cowboy. He likes referring to Caldwell as C-town and points out that it's just a few miles outside the more cosmopolitan Boise. Although he listens to the music of country star George Strait before games, you'll also find Nelly and Jay-Z in his CD collection. Pickett reserves the right to be a little bit country, a little bit hip-hop and a little bit of whatever else he desires. "People hear about the rodeo and all, and I think some of them expect me to walk around all the time with a cowboy hat, a big belt buckle and a piece of hay sticking out the corner of my mouth," he says. "I'm a football player, too, and I don't walk down the

street wearing a helmet and shoulder pads."

When Pickett does slip into his football gear, he slings the ball as well as he tosses a lasso. He owns most of Washington's passing records, including career yards (6,873) and touchdowns in a season (28 last year), and at 6' 4" and 220 pounds he has the size and arm strength to play in the NFL. "If he doesn't have a future at the next level," says USC coach Pete Carroll, former coach of the New York Jets and the New England Patriots, "I don't know who does." Says one NFL scout, "He's a first-round pick for sure."

But first Pickett is intent on helping the Huskies rebound from a disappointing 7-6 finish last season, a task that begins rather dauntingly on Saturday when Washington opens against defending national champion Ohio State in Columbus. Pickett is regarded as one of the early favorites for the Heisman Trophy and the Ohio State game could serve as a sort of New Hampshire primary.

Pickett had Heisman-caliber numbers in 2002, when he threw for 4,458 yards, 516 more than USC quarterback Carson Palmer, who won the award. But Palmer passed for 425 yards and four touchdowns in a win over Notre Dame, which helped sway the voters in his favor. A big game against the Buckeyes in front of a national audience could make Pickett this year's early front-runner.

LOOKING GOOD Strong-armed and 6' 4", Pickett, a senior, is a serious Heisman candidate and a likely NFL first-rounder.



The game will also provide an early indication of how well the Huskies have rebounded from the firing of Neuheisel, Washington's popular but trouble-plagued coach. Neuheisel was dismissed on June 12 after it was discovered that he had participated in high-stakes college basketball tournament pools over the last two years, a violation of NCAA rules. While he was fighting to get his job back in June and July—Neuheisel's final appeal was denied by the school on July 28—the program was in a state of

got to see that there are no shortcuts."

Like his son, Dee was as adept with a football as he was with a rope. Dee started at quarterback for two seasons at Boise State in 1976 and '77 but gave up the sport before his senior season, partly because of knee problems and partly in order to concentrate on rodeo. Cody has made the opposite choice, putting aside his budding rodeo career—he earned \$30,000 while in high school—to pursue football. He keeps his hats, boots and saddles in storage at his fa-

wasn't roping or riding, Pickett was usually learning about football from his father.

Cody was a fast learner in both sports, developing into a star quarterback at Caldwell High and becoming skilled enough with a lasso to advance to the national rodeo finals in team roping in his sophomore and junior years. As a team roper Pickett would help force the steer in the direction of his partner, who would rope the horns; Pickett would then do the same with the feet.

Pickett is equally adept at roping the feet

Growing up, Pickett COMBINED RODEO AND FOOTBALL. At rodeos he would turn riders into receivers, tossing his Nerf football to cowboys on their horses.

limbo. "The uncertainty was tough," says Gilbertson, who was interim coach before getting the job on July 29. "Once everything became permanent, we had about three months of work to do in two weeks, including recruiting and filling out the coaching staff."

The Huskies don't seem at all distracted by the coaching transition. In fact, although they are quick to express their affection for Neuheisel, there was a general feeling during preseason practices that the team was developing more of an edge under the old-school Gilbertson than it had when the more laid-back Neuheisel was in charge. The music that used to blare while the players stretched at the beginning of practice under Neuheisel is gone, replaced by the sounds of a team immediately getting down to business. "Are you working, men?" Gilbertson barked at the start of a recent afternoon session. "I'll tell you one thing: Ohio State is working!"

Pickett needs no such exhortations. He learned the value of work early, traveling the rodeo circuit with his father, Dee, a former world champion who was inducted into the professional rodeo Hall of Fame in August. In the summers and on vacations from school, Cody rode the buses from town to town with his dad and the other cowboys. "Sometimes I would go to sleep in Utah and wake up in Wyoming," he says. "It was fun for a kid, but it was a hard life for them. In rodeo they say, 'If you ain't winning, you ain't eating,' so guys practiced their skills all the time. I really



LIKE FATHER . . . A rodeo Hall of Famer, Dee coached Cody in football and taught him how to ride a horse at a young age.

ther's house in Idaho (Pickett's parents are divorced), and he has given away or sold all but one of the five horses he owned before he enrolled at Washington. "The last time I was on a horse was the day I reported to camp as a freshman," he says. "But I'll probably go back to it when my football days are over."

By the time he was in grade school, Pickett was already combining rodeo and football. At the rodeos he would turn the riders into receivers, tossing his Nerf football to the cowboys as they circled him while warming up their horses with a light canter. When he

of teammates as they walk by, and he's tempted by other targets. "We were on the golf course one time and some geese were around," says Washington senior fullback Adam Seery. "Cody was like, 'Dang, I wish I had my rope.' " But Pickett doesn't show off his rodeo skills to teammates very often. "Probably the best way to get him to bring his ropes out is to tell him you're better at it than he is," says junior tackle Khalif Barnes.

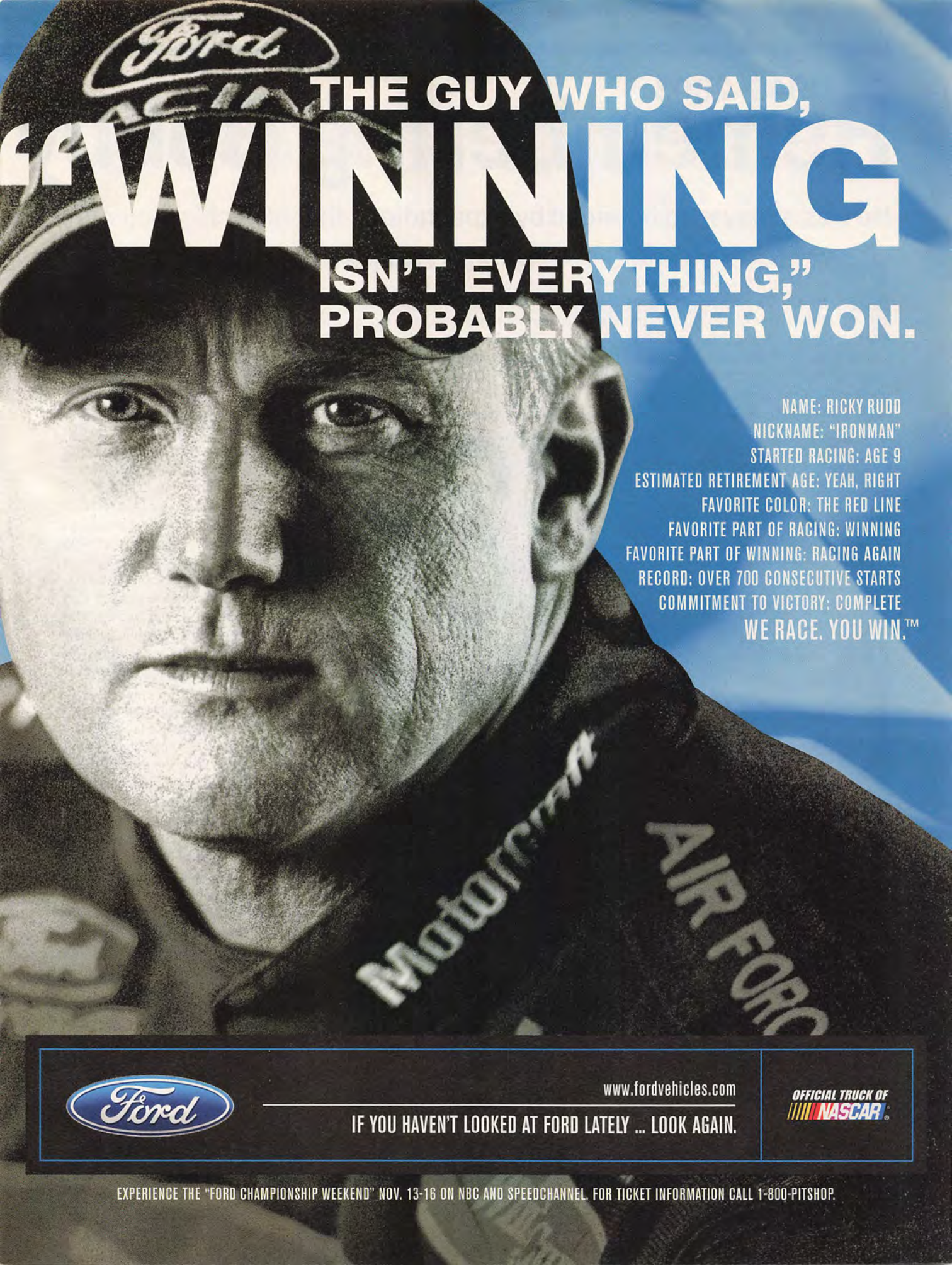
That's because the ultracompetitive Pickett can't pass up a contest of any sort. No challenge is too small, no challenger too young. When he played a football video game against the 12-year-old daughter of quarterbacks coach John Pettas this summer, he was generous enough to let her score on the first play. "But then she started talking trash to me, so what could I do?" Pickett says, smiling. "I had to show her who's boss."

Junior wideout Reggie Williams recently boasted that he could beat Pickett, who was also an outstanding high school basketball player, in one-on-one eight out of 10 games. When that information was relayed to Pickett, he immediately sought out Williams. He didn't care that his buddy was in the middle of a live radio interview at the time. "You can beat me eight out of 10?" he said to Williams. "Are you kidding me?"

The Huskies are better off when Pickett gives and Williams receives, and they're hoping their cowboy QB will begin distributing touchdown passes this weekend in Columbus. If he does, he will take a giant step toward that Heisman, and once he gets close enough, Cody Pickett can rope just about anything.

Check out Phil Taylor's Hot Button column every Monday at si.com.

MILAN CHUCKOVICH/IDAHO STATESMAN



THE GUY WHO SAID,
WINNING
ISN'T EVERYTHING,
PROBABLY NEVER WON.

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1946–2003 Remembering Bobby

He was a player so hounded by expectations that his achievements were

BY RON FIMRITE

FOR ALL his considerable accomplishments in baseball—332 home runs, 461 stolen bases, five seasons with 30 or more of both—Bobby Bonds remains curiously underappreciated. His reputation was, in the final analysis, a casualty of the unfairly high expectations he should

ered and of the inevitable comparisons he suffered playing alongside a more famous teammate. Blessed with extraordinary speed and power, Bonds was trumpeted as “the new Willie Mays” when he joined the San Francisco Giants as a rookie outfielder in the late 1960s, even though the old Willie

Mays was still very much a presence playing alongside him in the Giants’ outfield.

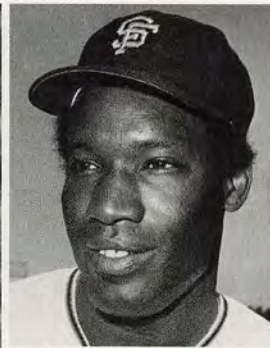
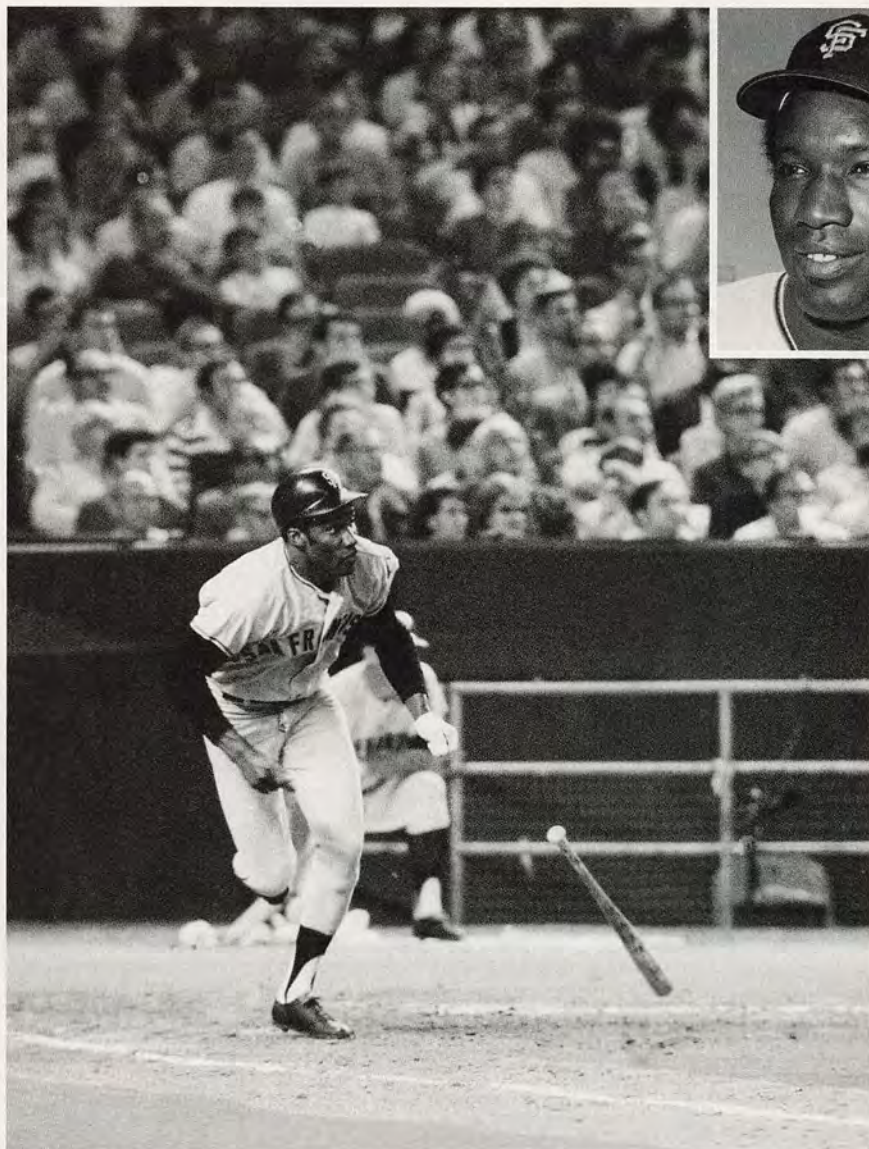
In a 1970 game at Candlestick Park against the Cincinnati Reds, there was a play that seems, in retrospect, symbolic of Bonds’s often frustrating career. With Mays playing center and Bonds in right, the Reds’ Bobby Tolan hit a long drive to right center that Bonds and Mays chased, neither calling off the other because neither appeared to have much chance of reaching the ball before it sailed over Candlestick’s wire fence. Both leaped high, colliding in midair, but it was Mays who came down with the ball in his glove despite having been knocked unconscious by the collision. Mays later rated that catch as superior to the fabled over-the-shoulder grab he made to rob Vic Wertz in the 1954

World Series. Bonds, unashamedly, was the supporting act.

For much of his 14-year career, Bonds was oppressively accused of failing to live up to his apparently vast “potential,” a word he grew to despise. Ever the practical man, he accepted the criticism, arguing that Mays excepted, few players ever did achieve the potential assigned to them by overzealous reporters. He dismissed comparisons with Mays as absurd. “A guy like that you can’t follow,” he would say. He had fun with the very notion of a “new” or the “next” Mays, describing himself as the first of that hapless breed. In fact, he and Mays became fast friends, Bonds crediting the older man with motivating him as a player.

Mays became the godfather of Bonds’s son Barry, a boy who was romping in the Giants’ clubhouse when he was four years old, playing catch with his father. It is perhaps a final irony that Barry Bonds should exceed the expectations once heaped on

HIS OWN MAN Bobby Bonds (in the late 1960s) was able to see the folly of trying to be “the next Willie Mays.”



SHEFFY & LONG; AP (INSET)

Bonds

never fully appreciated

his father and be destined to surpass his godfather's home run feats—and that Bobby should be known in his final years as "Barry's dad."

The father became the clubhouse visitor, presiding, as he once did as the Giants' batting coach, over his son's amazing achievements. And it has been in the last few months that Bobby is finally gaining acclaim



BONDING With two walkoff homers against the Braves, Barry (right) honored Bobby, whose legacy he has fulfilled.

long overdue. Stricken with lung cancer nearly a year ago, he had heroically endured heart and brain surgeries and debilitating chemotherapy, often returning to Pac Bell Park for the last looks at the inheritor of his skills. Barry himself has frequently called attention to his father's courage. And as the son continues to topple records, researchers have discovered that the old man was himself a superior player and that his reputation as an underachiever was unfair.

Bobby saw Barry play for the last time on Aug. 20, at Pac Bell. He died three days later at 57, years shy, tragically, of his potential for a long life. □

MORE VALUABLE THAN EVER

BY TOM VERDUCCI

ON AUG. 19, four days before his father, Bobby, would succumb to lung cancer and a variety of other ailments, San Francisco slugger Barry Bonds called a team meeting. He had just returned to the Giants after spending five days with his ailing dad, and San Francisco had not won a game in his absence. According to his manager, Felipe Alou, "He talked to all of us to explain how he wants to help the team during his sadness." A subdued Bonds told reporters after batting practice that evening, "It was important for me to be there with my dad at this time. It's also important for me to be here, too. I'll do the best I can to do both. I just hope everyone understands."

Later that night, in the 10th inning of a tie game against Atlanta, Bonds walloped a long home run into McCovey Cove at Pac Bell Park to beat the Braves 5-4. "I've seen 500, 600, 650, 70, 71 and 73," Giants assistant general manager Ned Colletti said of Bonds's milestone home runs, "and I'm telling you, that one was bigger and more special than all of them. It gave you chills. The guy doesn't pick up a bat for a week, he's spending time with his ill father, and the first day he comes back, he wins the game for us. He is special." Bonds rushed out of the ballpark after the game to be at his father's side.

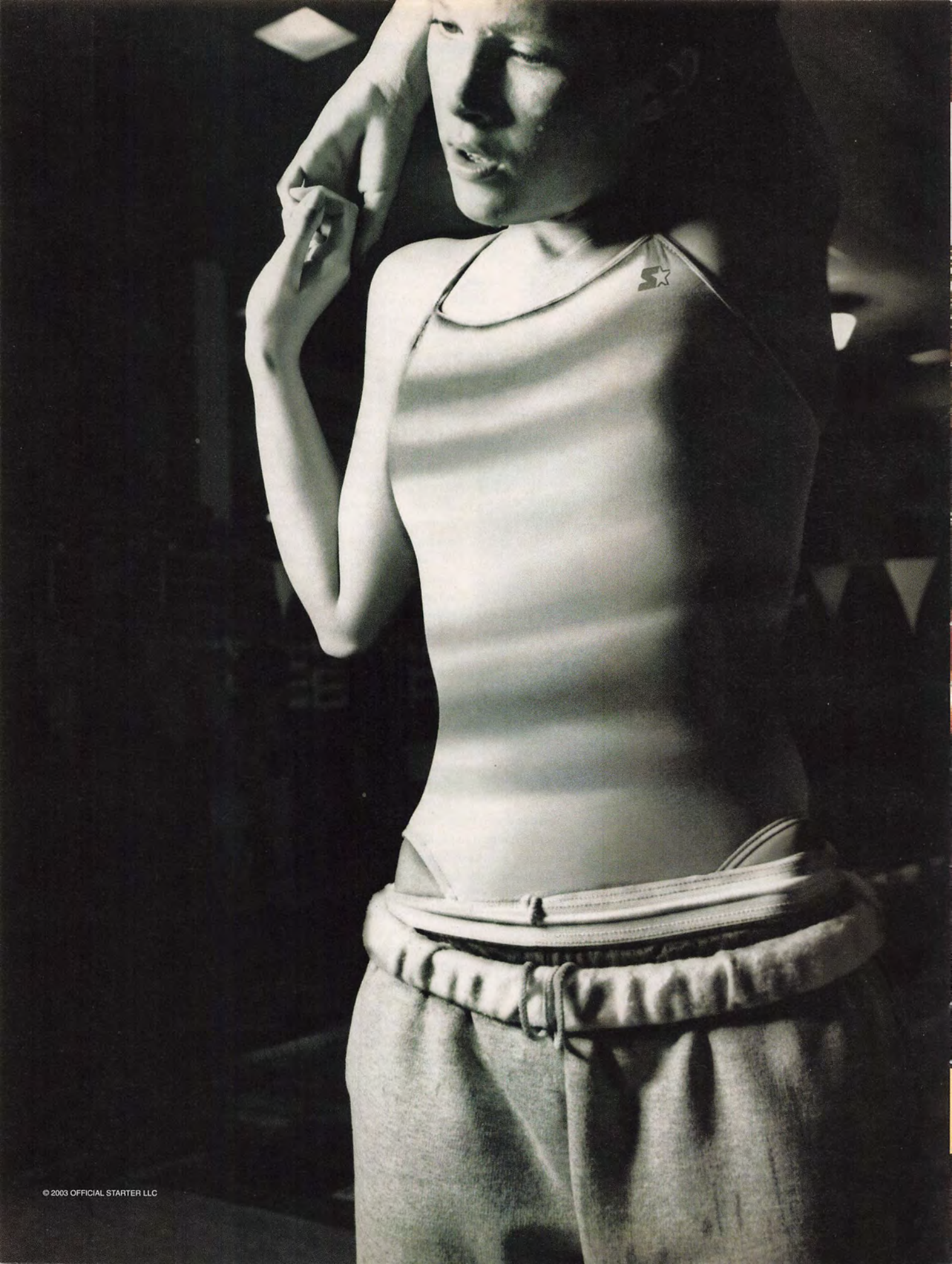
Two nights later, and one night after Bobby, in a wheelchair at Pac Bell, had watched him play, Barry did it again. He hit another 10th-inning walkoff homer to beat Atlanta 4-3 and complete a three-game sweep of the team with the best record in baseball. It was the 652nd home run of his career.

Even for a player who has made extraordinary feats routine, Bonds's week was an epic one—containing both heartbreaking poignance and the definitive testament to his greatness as a hitter. Ever patient for the rare pitch to hit, Bonds kept his focus despite his anguish. And when he connected, the Giants, who at week's end held a 10½-game lead in the National League West, were whole once again.

"The guy doesn't miss," marveled Florida Marlins manager Jack McKeon, whose pitchers walked Bonds three times and yielded a single to him last Friday. (Bonds left the Giants on Saturday and, as of Monday, the team was unsure when he would return.) "You don't see him hit dribblers. Every swing is a line drive, a bullet somewhere or out of the park."

If Bonds didn't lock up the National League's Most Valuable Player Award last week, he made sure the hardware is his to lose. He is so important to his team that even St. Louis Cardinals outfielder Albert Pujols, who is chasing the Triple Crown, plays in his shadow. Through Sunday, Pujols led the league in hitting (.362), trailed Bonds by five home runs (39-34) and was just 13 RBIs behind the Colorado Rockies' Preston Wilson (121-108), yet even a flirtation with the Triple Crown, last accomplished in the National League by the Cards' Joe Medwick in 1937, may not be enough to keep Pujols from finishing second to Bonds in the MVP voting for the second straight year.

With a .523 on-base percentage (thanks in part to 119 walks) and a .755 slugging percentage, Bonds is on pace to lead the league in both categories for the third consecutive season. If he does win the MVP award again, it will be his sixth, including his third straight after turning 37. By getting on base in more than half of his plate appearances once again, Bonds has flipped the game's established order. No longer does the pitcher—the one who initiates the action and has the ability to change the speed and spin of the ball—have the advantage over the hitter. At bat and in the MVP race, Bonds is the one in charge. □



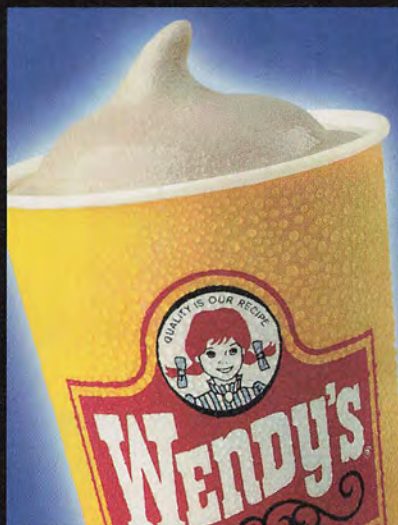
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LAP, TRAIN THE EXTRA HOUR - DID YOU?

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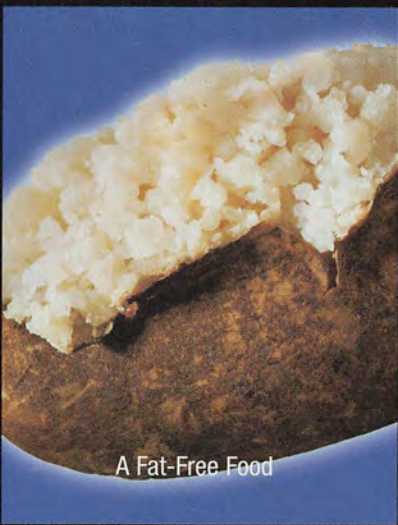
ALEKSA AKERFELDS

JUNIOR NATIONAL SWIMMER
HEIGHT: 5'9" WEIGHT: 130 LBS
TEAM: YWCA MIDDIES, WHITE PLAINS

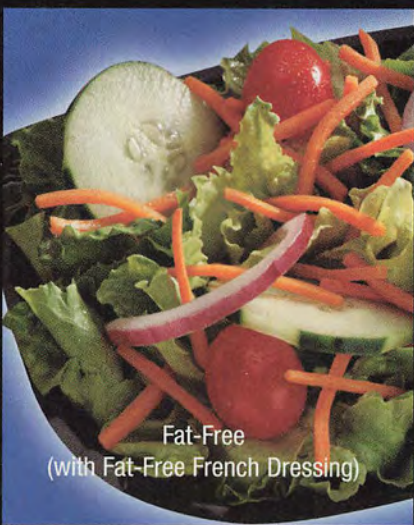




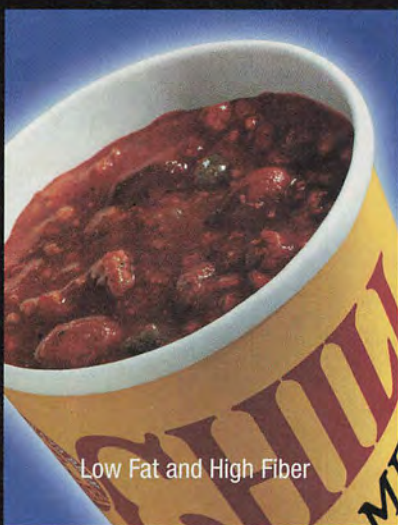
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NFL PREVIEW 2003

PRESSURE POINTS

Who can cut it in the race for the Super Bowl

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- **MARK SIMONEAU** PHILLY'S NEW MAN IN THE MIDDLE p. 70
- **DAVE WANNSTEDT** THE HEAT IS ON THE MIAMI COACH p. 74
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ALL 32 TEAMS
SCOUTING
REPORTS
PLUS DR. Z's FORECAST
Starting on p. 89

IN ST. LOUIS

The Marked MAN

Embattled Kurt Warner needs a return to MVP form to win back Rams fans and teammates

BY MICHAEL SILVER

A PREPPY GOES into a bar and walks up to an NFL star talking on a cellphone. The two men get into a heated discussion about health, integrity and the pursuit of Super Bowls. . . . If you're waiting for a punch line, forget it. This isn't a joke. The preppy, who looks as if he stepped out of a J. Crew catalog, was a St. Louis Rams fan. The bar was J. Buck's, a hot spot in suburban St. Louis, on a chilly evening late last November. The football player was the Rams' future Hall of Fame running back Marshall Faulk. The topic was quarterback Kurt Warner and the controversy

surrounding his suddenly not-so-golden right arm.

"Yo, Marshall," the preppy said by way of introduction, pushing forward so excitedly that he spilled Grey Goose and tonic on Faulk's size-11 Pradas. "Warner's got to go!"

"Really?" Faulk replied, bristling, his phone call having been abruptly ended. "You think you know football, huh?"

"Yeah, I do, and he's killing you guys," the preppy continued. "The kid's much better."

Faulk, who argues with the subtlety of a White Stripes guitar riff, started to boil. "Look," he said, "Kurt wants what I want. He wants what you want. And that's for the Rams to win." He reminded the preppy that Warner had played hurt in recent years yet had won

one Super Bowl, led the Rams into a second title game and won a pair of league MVP awards at the same time. "When he had two bad ribs and still got us that ring," Faulk said, "I didn't see you complaining then."

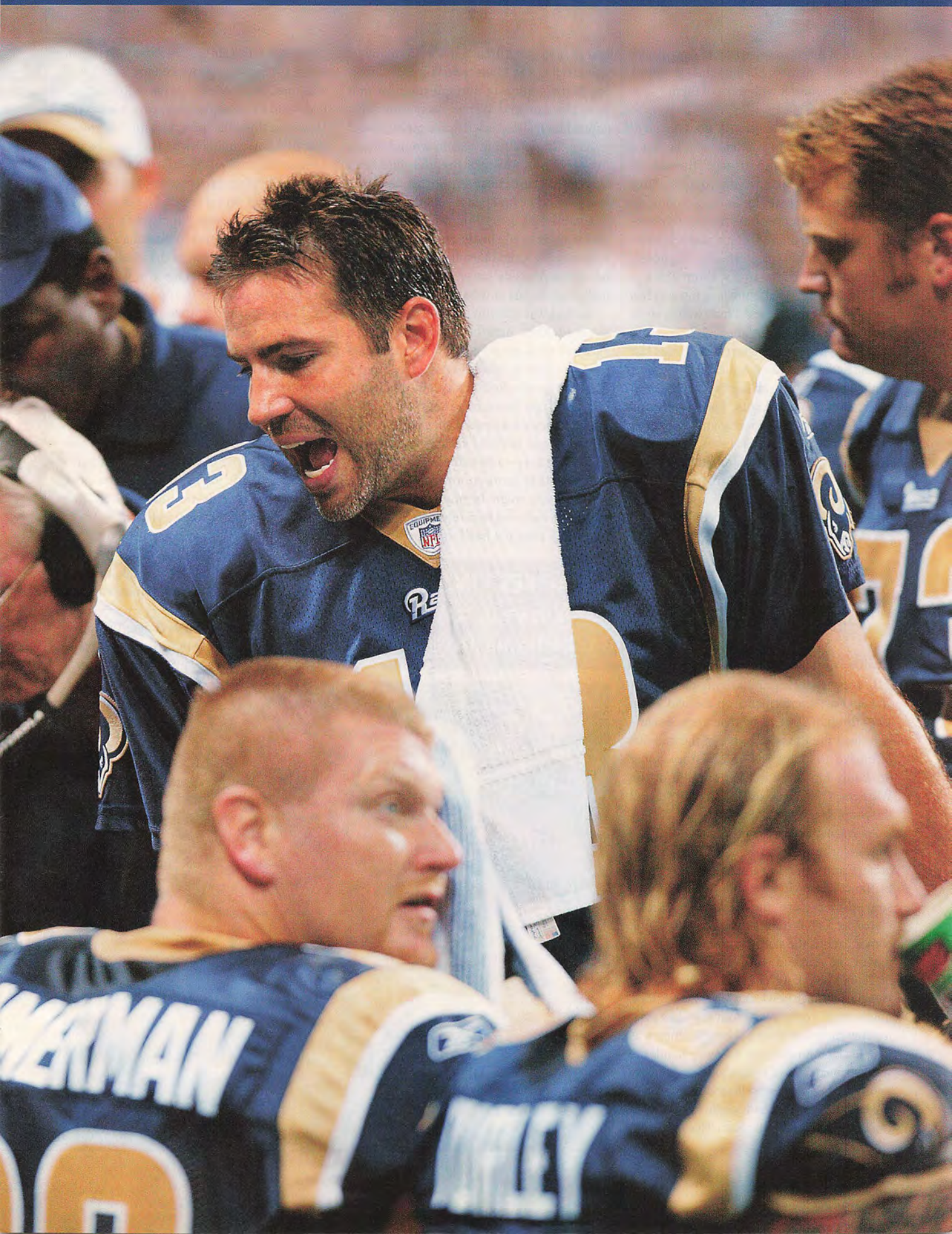
The preppy held his ground. "Yeah? Well if you want to win *now*, you'd better hope they give the damn ball to Marc Bulger," he said, "because Kurt Warner is D-O-N-E, done!"

What Faulk said next was littered with words that sounded suspiciously like his surname.

Recounting the incident months later, Faulk

TEST OF FAITH Players took sides in last year's quarterback controversy, but Warner believes he can rally his troops.





said, "Trust me, there were a lot of guys in a lot of bars who shared their thoughts on Kurt. I probably got into it with most of them."

KURTIS EUGENE WARNER does not go to bars, but contrary to popular belief he is not a total square. He and his wife, Brenda, do not spend every waking minute quoting Bible verses while consuming milk and cookies. Late in July, a couple of weeks after celebrating his 32nd birthday, the quarterback sat in the kitchen of his Chesterfield, Mo., home, sounding downright cocky about the upcoming season. "This is the best my arm has felt in years," he said, "and I can't wait to show everyone that the Rams are back."

Brenda, however, preferred to discuss last season and the backlash against her and Kurt while the Rams were falling from Super Bowl favorites to 7-9 washouts. The spunky former Marine, so prominently singled out by cameras in telecasts of St. Louis games and on stadium video screens, rolled her eyes in dismay. "I know people think we're overdone," she said. "Even *we* think we're overdone. We wonder, When are people going to get sick of us?"

taking sides; and Brenda made an infamous phone call to a St. Louis radio talk show, bringing Martz's honesty into question. At that point one Ram said, Warner "went from being a franchise quarterback to just a quarterback."

As a disappointing season wound down, Martz, who—outside of Brenda—had been Warner's staunchest supporter, declared there would be an open competition for the quarterback job in '03. (Martz later announced that Warner would be the starter.) Then, last February, Martz and members of the front office debated whether to pay Warner a \$6 million roster bonus or release or trade him.

As that was playing out, the Warners hit the road. Kurt, Brenda and their four kids, ages two to 14, rented a tour bus once owned by Aerosmith singer Steven Tyler, hired a driver and embarked on an eight-day, loosely charted trip through the Southeast. Along the way they experienced some sweet emotion—"It was the best vacation we've ever had," Kurt says—and had some bittersweet thoughts that another family journey, to a new NFL city, might be imminent.

Warner believed he'd return to the Rams, especially after his hand and shoulder had

checked out O.K. in an extensive postseason exam. ("They were convinced my rotator cuff was torn," Warner says of the club's higher-ups, "and I was anxious to prove it wasn't.") However, there had been no announcement that the team would pick up the roster bonus. Denver Broncos coach Mike Shanahan, for one, was hoping the Rams wouldn't. "If they were going to get rid of him," Shanahan said during training camp, "there was a guy over here who would've taken him in a second."

In the end the Rams decided to keep Warner, convinced that his arm was sound. Six months later all is apparently well in St. Louis. Warner's throwing hand, which has sustained three fractures (one in 2000 and two last year) and a sprained thumb, has mended. So, too, apparently, has the relationship between Warner and Martz, who says, "Kurt's one of the kindest, sweetest people there is. He went through a very difficult time last season, and I didn't help him much." Asked whether Warner is vulnerable to losing his job to Bulger, Martz says, "No. Kurt Warner is our quarterback. If he falters, he's still our quarterback."

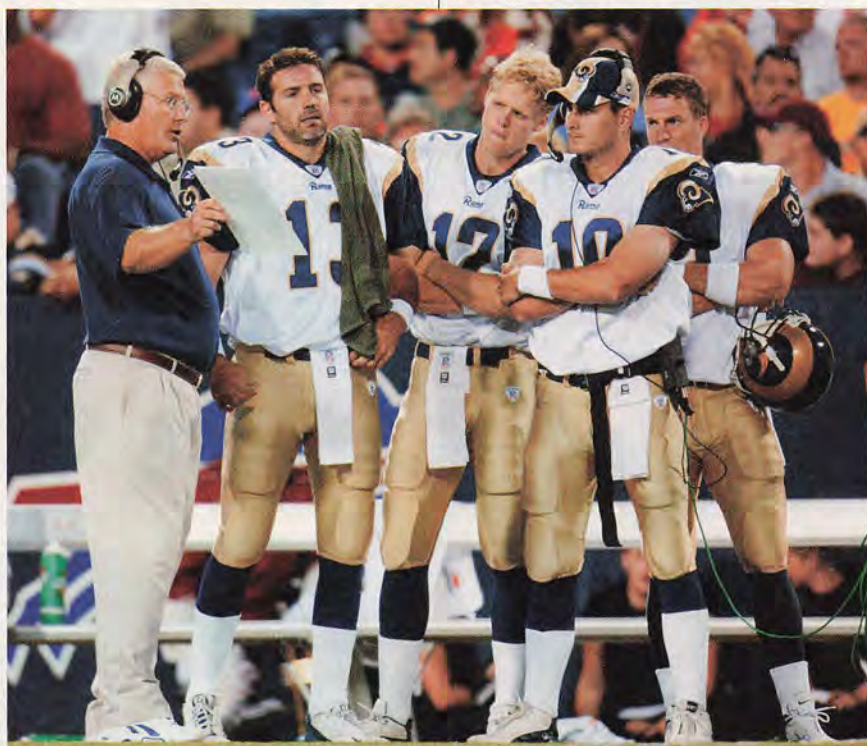
WHAT WENT WRONG in 2002? In a nutshell, everything. Injuries to Faulk, fullback James Hodgins and tackle Orlando Pace de-

QUARTERBACK OPTION Bulger (in cap) looks like a star in the making, but Martz (left) is standing by Warner as his starter.

"This is THE BEST MY ARM HAS FELT IN YEARS," Warner says as he begins his sixth year, "and I can't wait to show everyone that the Rams are back."

It appears their popularity is directly related to Kurt's performance on the field. From 1999 through 2001, as he rose from obscurity to lead the Rams on some of the greatest offensive displays in NFL history, most St. Louis fans couldn't get enough of the Warners. Then came the Crash of 2002 and the couple's plunge into disfavor.

As Warner prepares for his sixth NFL season, no other player in the league is under greater scrutiny. If he returns as the bold and brilliant passer in command of the Rams' souped-up offense, the team will regain its status as a championship contender. If he comes back as the skittish and mistake-prone player he turned into beginning with St. Louis's shocking loss to the New England Patriots in Super Bowl XXXVI, get ready for a quarterback controversy. And it will be even nastier than last year's when Warner was plagued by injuries to his throwing hand; the sudden emergence of Bulger, another formerly anonymous passer who flourished in coach Mike Martz's offense, had people all over town (including players in the Rams' locker room)





railed the Greatest Show on Turf, which also suffered from the free-agent defection of No. 3 receiver Az-Zahir Hakim. St. Louis's defense fell off, too, and, says Martz, "I probably didn't do a very good job of coaching." As for Warner, his rapid decline defied logic. Consider that from 1999 through 2001 he threw 98 touchdown passes against 53 interceptions and compiled a 103.4 passer rating. Last year, in what amounted to a little more than five games' worth of action, he had three touchdowns, 11 interceptions and a 67.4 rating. After winning 40 of 50 career starts, Warner went 0-6 in 2002.

But even before breaking his right pinkie early in the Rams' Sept. 29 loss to the Dallas Cowboys, Warner lacked the normal zip on his passes, and there were rumors among teammates that his arm was shot. Bulger, meanwhile, looked like the old Warner—

cocksure, cool in the pocket and winging the ball with scary precision. In leading St. Louis to five consecutive victories after the team had started 0-5—and setting an NFL record with 1,496 passing yards in his first five starts—Bulger had many fans, and some teammates, believing that he should remain in the lineup even after Warner was cleared to return.

While sidelined, Warner offered encouragement to Bulger, but the negativity surrounding his eventual return riled him. "I had done it for *three years*," he says, "and to think that in three games all that changes? That's ludicrous."

When Warner returned to the starting lineup against the Washington Redskins on Nov. 24, he showed flashes of his old self. He completed 34 of 49 passes for 301 yards and was in the process of producing a dramatic comeback victory when he was stripped at the Washington six-yard line by blitzing linebacker LaVar Arrington. The Redskins recovered the fumble with 17 seconds remaining, icing a 20-17 victory.

GOOD OMEN Warner looked like his old self last Saturday, hitting on 13 of 15 passes in the face of a strong Buffalo pass rush.

After the game it was Warner's throwing hand that needed ice. He had apparently reinjured his passing hand while falling to the ground, and in practice the following week he couldn't take a snap. Instead someone handed Warner a ball, and despite severe swelling, he was able to fling it 50 yards with reasonable velocity and accuracy. "It's like we were all in denial," Warner says. "No one, including me, wanted to believe [the hand] could be broken."

The next game, against the Philadelphia Eagles, was a disaster as Warner threw two costly interceptions in a 10-3 loss. With a 5-7 record, St. Louis's season was essentially over, and Warner knew his hand wasn't right. From that point on things started getting ugly.

Warner says he informed a team doctor on the flight home from Philadelphia that he wanted to get the hand X-rayed. The follow-

Should the Rams start Kurt Warner or Marc Bulger at quarterback? To cast your vote, go to si.com/magazine.

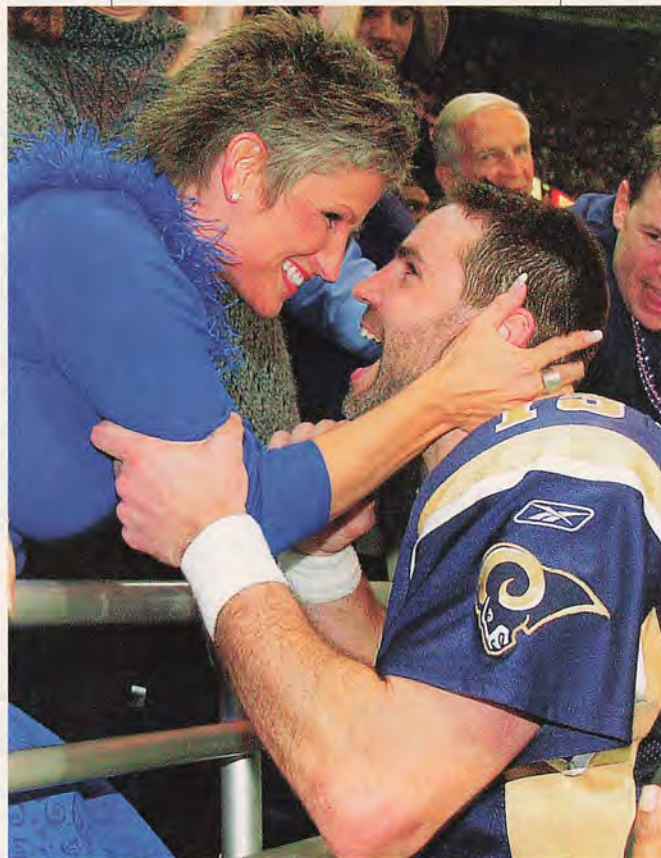
ing afternoon Martz told reporters that he had suggested the X-ray, which revealed a broken bone below the pinkie. The next morning Brenda was driving to a kickboxing class when she heard *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* columnist Bryan Burwell and radio personality John Maracek discussing the injury on sports-talk station KFNS. Burwell and Maracek debated whether Warner's insistence that he'd been healthy enough to play against the Eagles would affect Martz's ability to trust him in the future. Brenda immediately placed a cellphone call to the station and was put on the air. Martz, Brenda said, "did not insist that Kurt get an X-ray. . . . [Martz] had nothing to do with it. All week long [before the Eagles game] I said, 'Kurt, I am a [former] nurse, you should get an X-ray.'"

After saying her piece, Brenda called Kurt and blurted, "You want me in that foxhole, right?" Then she explained what she had done. Kurt felt his wife had merely defended his integrity. "The point is," he says, "I never lied about anything, and as a Christian role model, that's not something I'd ever want people to believe I would do. Last year was a difficult year for all of us, and the pressure got to a lot of people."

Whatever the truth as to who asked for the X-ray (Martz stood by his statement), the talk-show incident did not play well in the St. Louis locker room, where resentment of Brenda's high profile had already been building. Privately several players said Kurt should address his teammates about Brenda's call to the radio station as a way to smooth things over. Warner sought the advice of teammates, including tight end Ernie Conwell, his closest friend on the team. "I advised him against addressing the team, because I think he would have ended up making it a bigger issue," recalls Conwell, now with the New Orleans Saints. "The team was in a funny place.

A lot of the married guys understood, because everybody's wife wants to stand up for him. But there were a lot of guys who think women should just stay out of these things."

CAMERA FRIENDLY Brenda was front and center during Kurt's rise to stardom, but her act has worn thin with some Rams.



"I know people think we're overdone," says Brenda. "Even we think we're overdone. We wonder, When are people GOING TO GET SICK OF US?"

The ridicule of Brenda extended beyond St. Louis. During the playoffs a high-ranking executive with one AFC team referred to her as "Yoko Warner."

Over the course of several conversations, Warner and Martz repaired their relationship, and Brenda reached out to the coach. Warner had a shaky first day of minicamp in May—"I was so bad, I started to wonder, What if I really *have* lost it?" Warner says—but in training camp he looked enough like the quarterback who led the Rams to two Super Bowls that his teammates were impressed. "Guys were divided on him and

[Bulger] last year, and there's still some division," says one veteran, "but Kurt has shown us that he's back."

Says Faulk, "Kurt has delivered for us under pressure time and time again, and he deserves to be our leader until he proves otherwise."

In St. Louis's second preseason game, against the Super Bowl-champion Tampa Bay Buccaneers and their top-ranked defense, Warner completed all seven of his passes, for 55 yards. Then against the Buffalo Bills last Saturday, he completed 13 of 15 passes for 125 yards and a touchdown. Warner expects to continue playing at that level throughout the season, to be named the league's Comeback Player of the Year and, most important, to make another title run.

AS HE SAT in his house that July day, Warner laughed as he recounted the time last fall his 11-year-old daughter, Jesse, came home from school and, prompted by a classmate's barb, asked Brenda, "Does Daddy suck?"

Recalled Kurt, "I was like, 'Well, right now he does, but it won't last long.' " Smiling confidently again, he said, "I know there are still doubters."

Of course, the first time Warner throws an interception or fails to deliver in the final minute or has a lousy game, preppies and other fans in bars all over

St. Louis will be calling for Bulger to replace him. Perhaps there will be similar talk among his teammates, but Warner dismisses such conjecture.

"I've never been this pumped up about a season," he said, his right hand twitching with excitement. "If you told me that I'll stay healthy, and most of our key players will stay healthy. . . ." He broke off the sentence, then grabbed his left hand and began toying with a ring, thinking about Super Bowl XXXVIII. "Well," he continued, "let's just say I'd be planning on getting another one of these." □

Look for Michael Silver's *Open Mike* column every Thursday at si.com.



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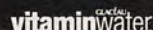
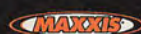


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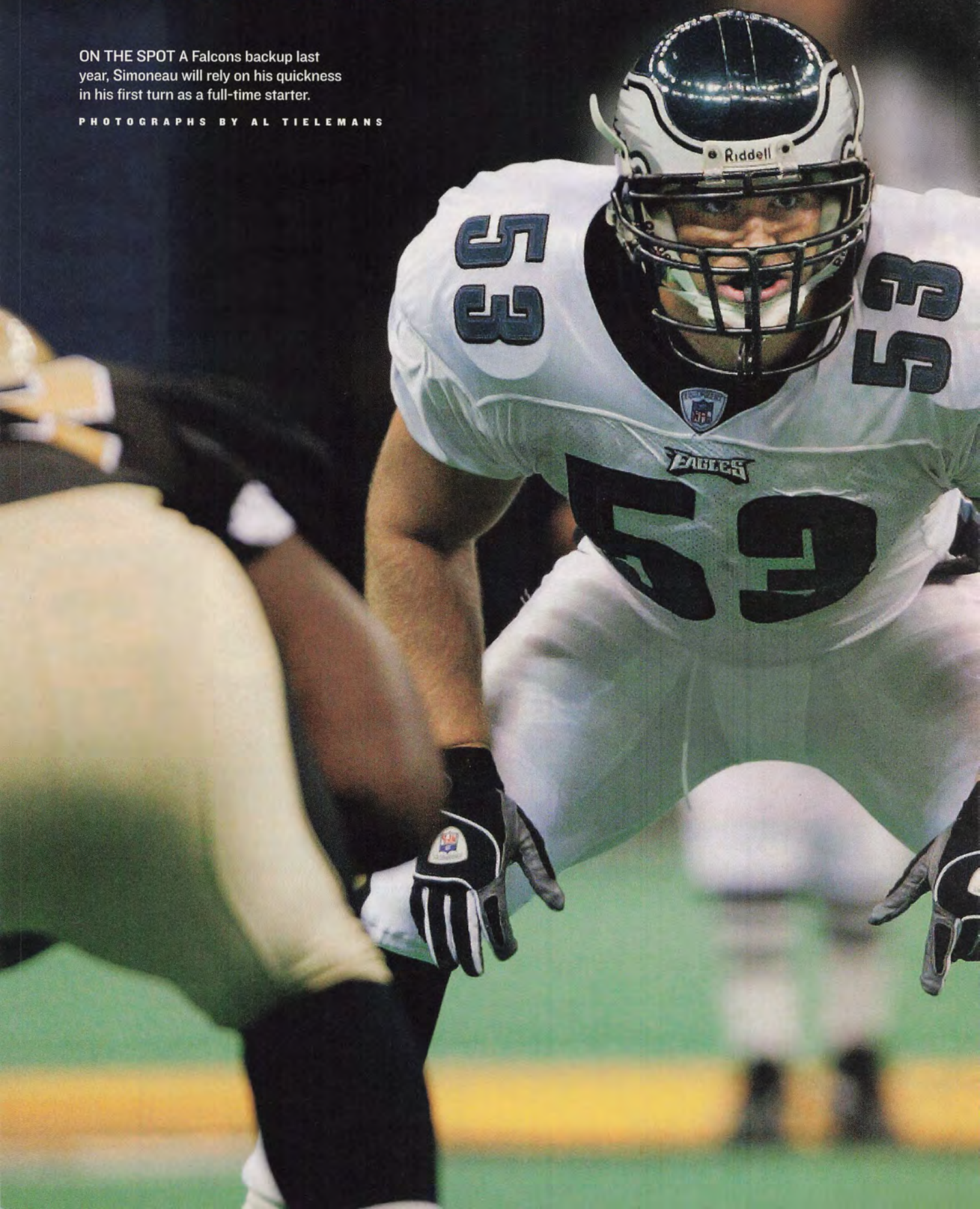
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PRESSURE POINTS 2003
NFL PREVIEW

ON THE SPOT A Falcons backup last year, Simoneau will rely on his quickness in his first turn as a full-time starter.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY AL TIELEMANS



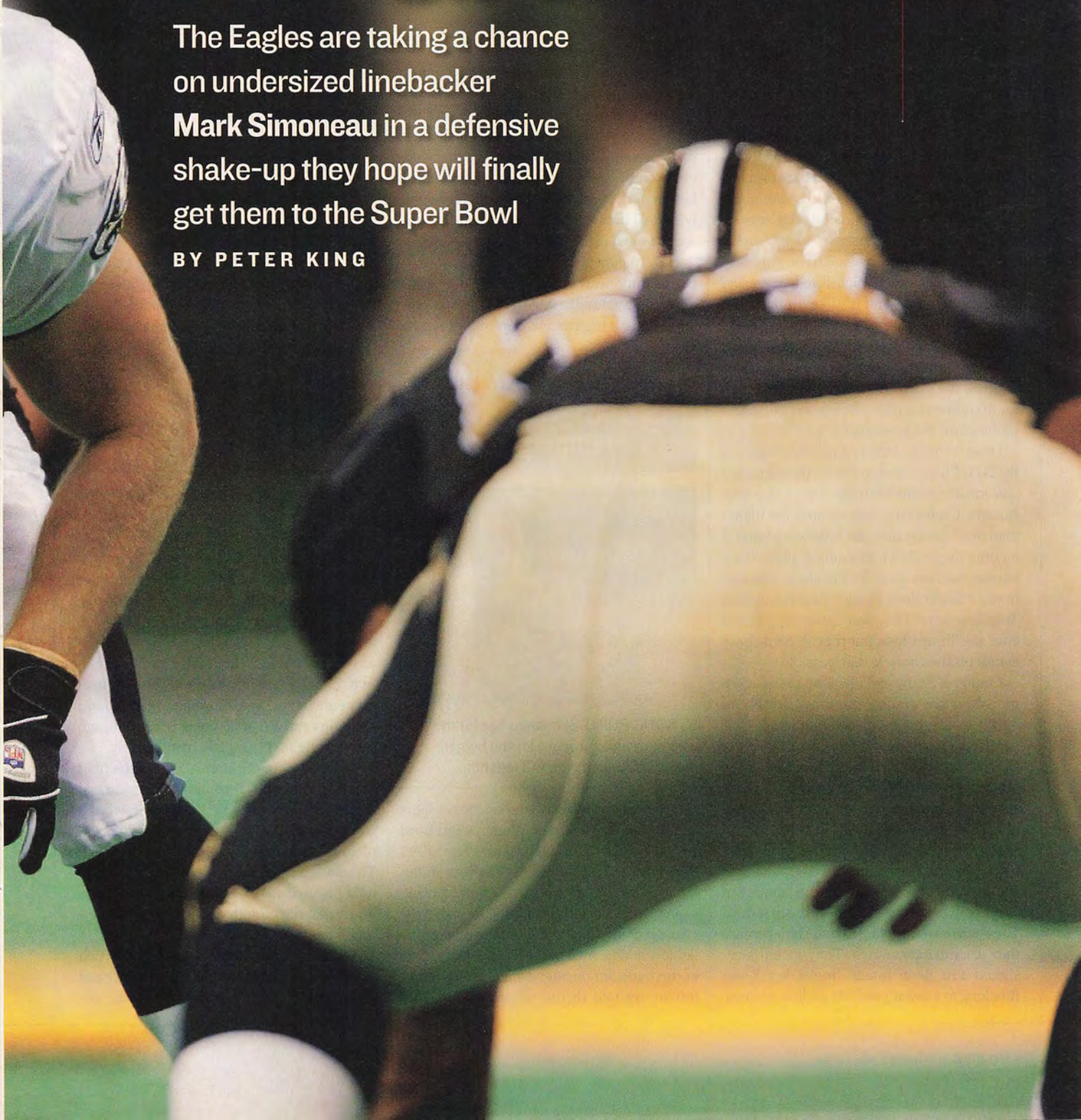
IN PHILADELPHIA

The GAMBLE

The Eagles are taking a chance
on undersized linebacker

Mark Simoneau in a defensive
shake-up they hope will finally
get them to the Super Bowl

BY PETER KING



THE NEWS hit the sports wire on the evening of March 4 and was duly reported by Philadelphia radio and TV stations, though not with the vim and vigor of the Flyers' or Phillies' highlights from that day. *The Eagles traded a sixth-round pick in 2003 and a fourth-rounder in 2004 to the Atlanta Falcons for linebacker Mark Simoneau.* ¶ Eagles safety Brian Dawkins was sitting in his Jacksonville home when he got word. "Simon who?" he said aloud. ¶ With all the headline deals in the off-season—the Denver Broncos signed Jake Plummer, the Falcons traded for Peer-

less Price, the New England Patriots signed Roosevelt Colvin and Rodney Harrison, the Washington Redskins paid a king's ransom for Laveranues Coles, the St. Louis Rams traded for Kyle Turley—the best the Eagles could do was Mark Simoneau? A 26-year-old backup middle linebacker and special teams player? Hadn't Philadelphia, the NFL's winningest franchise over the last three regular seasons (34–14), lost defensive starters Hugh Douglas, Levon Kirkland and Shawn Barber, plus kick-returner-deluxe Brian Mitchell, to free agency?

"I understand what it's like up here," Simoneau said recently, as he bit into a cheese steak at Pat's in South Philly. So anonymous is Simoneau that, even in a city that adores its "Iggles," he dined at this popular hangout for 40 minutes without being recognized. "I understand the pressure on me."

Or so he thinks. After consecutive losses in the NFC Championship Game, including last season's 27–10 shocker to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, Eagles fans' expectations are higher than they've been since the franchise played in its only Super Bowl, in January 1981. "Last season our fans were off the chart, wanting to win a Super Bowl so bad," says cornerback Troy Vincent. "They were so disappointed after the Tampa loss, but they've come back double off the chart. Is that possible?"

Could be. At the end of a long practice last month, a fan among the crowd of about 4,000 at training camp on the Lehigh University campus began to chant, "Soo-per BOWL! Soo-per BOWL!" Soon most of the other Eagles faithful joined in, and the chant echoed off the forested hills. "Every day we hear this," says Dawkins. "Every day."

Into this pressure cooker steps Simoneau, who is expected to not only become a full-time starter for the first time in his pro career, but also to call defensive signals for the first time. The Falcons were willing to trade him because they are linebacker-rich. They recently resigned Pro Bowl inside linebacker Keith Brooking to a seven-year, \$41 million contract,

and they judged other young linebackers, notably Chris Draft, to be better than Simoneau at playing the outside. In three seasons with Atlanta, Simoneau started nine games but made his mark on special teams, blocking a punt that resulted in a touchdown in a wildcard round upset of the Green Bay Packers last January. He says the move to Philadelphia was ideal because he can start full time and use his speed in the team's aggressive schemes.

Nevertheless, in plugging the 6-foot, 243-pound Simoneau into the middle linebacker spot, the Eagles are making a big change—and taking a big chance. Perennially one of

strength in his shoulders and lower body, upping his bench press from 400 pounds to 440. During the season he expects to weigh around 238 pounds. "I'll be a bigger hitter and more physical than I've ever been," he says.

But why the drastic change for a unit that ranked fourth in the league in total defense last year? Lack of quickness. Speedy running backs beat Trotter and Kirkland to the outside, and the two big men couldn't stay with some tight ends in pass coverage. What's more, the inability of Trotter and Kirkland to blitz handcuffed defensive coordinator Jim Johnson. The capper came last Dec. 28, when the New York Giants' Tiki Barber scampered around the edges for 203 rushing yards. "We had to get faster," Johnson says. (Simoneau has run the 40 in 4.5 seconds, though he's in the 4.6 range now.) The team has fared so well with hold-the-point defensive tackles—Philly will rotate four 290-pound-plus monsters at those interior positions—that Johnson was willing to sacrifice a run-stuffer for a sideline-to-sideline playmaker. That's the big risk: Is Simoneau large enough and strong enough to stop the run up the middle?

Put yourself in Johnson's shoes: In their

"I understand what it's like up here," Simoneau says of the expectations of Eagles fans. "I understand THE PRESSURE ON ME."



STRONG POINT Simoneau has hit the weight room to prepare for the bigger, physical linemen who will test him.

the league's top defensive teams, Philadelphia had 262-pound Jeremiah Trotter, a Pro Bowl player, at middle linebacker from 1999 through 2001; last season the position belonged to Kirkland, who, according to a club source, weighed 330 pounds by the end of the year. Now the Eagles will employ one of the lightest middle men in the league. At the time of the trade Simoneau weighed 233 pounds, but he trained in the off-season to build

final three games last season—the loss to the Giants, the win against the Falcons and the loss to the Bucs—the Eagles allowed 374 yards of total offense per game, with opposing quarterbacks completing 63.6% of their throws and getting sacked only four times. Change wasn't an option, Johnson believed, it was a necessity. Besides, it's not as if a relatively small middle linebacker can't succeed in today's NFL. The starters in the Pro Bowl last February, Zach Thomas of the Miami Dolphins and Brian Urlacher of the Chicago Bears, weigh 235 and 244, respectively.

After watching Simoneau roam the field in camp, Johnson was confident the team had made the right move. "I'm seeing what I wanted to see," he says. "I'm seeing great explosion, playmaking ability and a Zach Thomas-type of toughness. You'll see him hold his own against the run, and you'll see him make the athletic plays we weren't getting from our middle linebacker."

Yet Simoneau wouldn't be an Eagle if coach Andy Reid and club president Joe Banner had given Trotter the \$6 million a year he de-



CLOSING IN Simoneau broke through the line and pressured Patriots quarterback Tom Brady in a preseason game last Friday.

Says Reid, who as the team's executive vice president of football operations has final say on personnel moves, "Look, there's a side of Hugh that you'll miss, but athletes pick things up when guys leave. You move on. We've been fortunate we've been able to handle all the changes we've had to make."

So Simoneau won't be the only newcomer to the defense under the gun. In addition to McDougale, add backup N.D. Kalu, who is also vying to replace Douglas, and free-agent pickup Nate Wayne, who moves into Barber's outside linebacker spot, to the list. Ultimately, however, opponents will go after Simoneau the hardest, hoping to exploit the little guy. "I'm sure people are going to look at this defense, see what's different about it and test me," he says. "But being physical has never been a problem for me, and it won't be now."

A middle linebacker at Kansas State, Simoneau was a third-round draft pick by Atlanta in 2000. Over the next two years the Falcons

tried him in the middle and on the outside. Last year, when Wade Phillips took over as defensive coordinator, Simoneau lined up inside only to suffer an abdominal strain in camp. He didn't feel comfortable all season and played sparingly as Brooking's backup. "No bitterness," Simoneau says of his time in Atlanta. "I learned a lot. It prepared me for this chance."

Atlanta tried to persuade the Buffalo Bills to take Simoneau in a trade for wideout Peerless Price last March, but Buffalo took a first-round draft choice instead. Then the Eagles came calling, completing the deal with Atlanta and signing Simoneau to a five-year contract on the same day. "The night he got traded," says Monica, his wife of two months, "he was so excited he couldn't sleep. He just paced the room."

"It's pretty rare to go from not playing much to starting for a defense that's among the top five in the league," Simoneau says. "But in the end I can't worry about that stuff. I can't be in awe of it. It's still just playing football."

In Philly, there's more to it than that. □

manded as a free agent after the '01 season. Trotter signed a seven-year, \$35.5 million deal with the Washington Redskins and started 12 games before tearing his right ACL. Maintaining flexibility under the salary cap is a big part of Philly's philosophy. Likewise, when Douglas, a 32-year-old defensive end and the team's best pass rusher since Reggie White in the early '90s, wanted \$5 million a year as a free agent after last season, the Eagles let him walk and used their first-round draft pick on Miami defensive end Jerome McDougale. Banner gets rave reviews around the league for holding the line on spending while consistently fielding a Super Bowl contender; at week's end, the Eagles were \$10.2 million under the \$75 million cap.

In recent years no other team has done a better job of filling holes in the secondary and along the defensive line through the draft and with relatively inexpensive free agents. However, some veterans, frustrated by repeatedly

falling short in the playoffs, are getting tired of hearing how the team is in such great cap shape. They want to know why management isn't spending some of that available money to make the team even better. In particular, why was Douglas, far and away the team's best pass rusher with 51½ sacks in five years, allowed to sign with the Jacksonville Jaguars? (They gave him a five-year, \$27 million deal.)

"I understand it, but I don't agree with it," Vincent says of the team's philosophy. "If I were in the owner's seat, I'd want Joe Banner doing the cap. I'd love him. But as a player, I hate him. Do you know what Hugh Douglas meant to this team? His leadership, his personality, his love of the game were vital. The guys who'll replace him, how do you know they can do it? In the NFL the window of opportunity [for winning a Super Bowl] is so short, and it's closing for us."

"Hugh was a good player for us, but a descending player," Banner says. "How good a guy is in the locker room is a factor, but is it a 10 percent factor? A 30 percent factor? It depends. Andy has a lot to say about that."

For more from Peter King, check out Monday Morning Quarterback at si.com.

IN MIAMI

The HOT SEAT

An NFL coach on merit, or because he rode Jimmy Johnson's coattails? This season may be **Dave Wannstedt's** last chance to make his case

BY JEFFRI CHADIHA

THEY NIBBLED on grilled Kobe beef at trendy Tao in midtown, crammed onto a crowded subway near Little Italy and laughed throughout much of *Hairspray* on Broadway. Miami Dolphins coach Dave Wannstedt and his wife, Jan, had never really explored New York City, so in early July they took to the streets. Wannstedt ambled around in his trademark Tommy Bahama shirts and linen shorts. He jogged in Central Park. He negotiated with street vendors and outthustled locals for cabs. ♣ To hear that their father had suddenly become a laid-back tourist was news to

Wannstedt's grown daughters, Jami and Keri, who see him as a restless busybody with a short attention span. Dad says the transition wasn't hard at all. "It was easy for me to relax, because I have been feeling really good about my team," he says. "I'm excited to see what we can accomplish." So, too, is all of South Florida—where this season the bright sun won't be the only source of heat on Wannstedt.

The Dolphins bring back the NFL rushing champion (Ricky Williams) and seven Pro Bowl players on defense, including the league leader in sacks (end Jason Taylor). They traded for a future Hall of Famer (linebacker Junior Seau) and signed a pair of valuable free agents (safety Sammy Knight and quarterback Brian Griese). This Miami team is deeper and more dangerous than the one that last year went 9-7 and missed the playoffs for the first time in six seasons. "They can control a game on offense and defense," says Kansas City Chiefs offensive coordinator Al Saunders. "That's a scary thought."

But that's all been said before. "We've had

high expectations and flopped," middle line-backer Zach Thomas bluntly states. "We have no excuses anymore. We have to win something, or some people won't be back." Wannstedt, in his fourth year as Miami's coach, is the name most often mentioned.

Though the Dolphins won 11 games in each of Wannstedt's first two years, they made early playoff exits, in the divisional round in 2000 and the wild-card round in '01. Worse, after starting 5-1 last season, Miami lost six of its last 10 games—the most brutal a 27-24 overtime defeat to the New England Patriots in the season finale. That loss, in which they blew an 11-point lead in the last five minutes, cost the Dolphins a playoff berth.

For the first time in three off-seasons Wannstedt did not receive a one-year extension from owner Wayne Huizenga. Wannstedt has two years left on his contract, and while Huizenga is saying all the right things publicly—"I think Dave is going to be around here for a long time," he says—the message was clear. "Look at all the additions we made," Huizenga said after practice one

day last month. "Yeah, we lost a couple of guys. But we should have a heck of a team."

The players are well aware of the pressure on their coach. "We all like Dave, but he has a difficult job ahead," says wideout Oronde Gadsden. "He has to get us all on the same page, and that has to happen fast."

At the start of camp the 51-year-old Wannstedt, who was fired after six seasons with the Chicago Bears in his only other stint as an NFL head coach, seemed unfazed. "I worried about job security when I had to win at least six games my last season in Chicago," he said of 1998, when the Bears finished 4-12 and he was dismissed. "The expectation here is [winning] the Super Bowl. The goal is to find a way to be better than last year."

Always looking to improve himself as a coach, Wannstedt keeps a journal that dates to 1989 and his early days as an NFL assistant; he won't discuss the contents of the notebooks, which are stacked in a closet of his office. Looking for guidance after the team's collapse last year he visited with coaching friends like Jimmy Johnson, who encouraged him to stick to his philosophy; Larry Bird, who discussed the art of finishing off an opponent; and Pat Riley, who talked about team unity. Wannstedt also encouraged his staff to pick the brains of colleagues they encountered at the Senior Bowl and the NFL combine.

His best off-season move was addressing leadership. Too many of the Dolphins' best

LESSON LEARNED Wannstedt says his experience in Chicago taught him the value of communicating and delegating more.



players are mild-mannered and good-natured, gifted athletes who don't take leadership roles and often stray from their assignments. "They play less as a team late in the year," says an AFC team executive. "They take risks that hurt them. Jason Taylor will abandon his responsibilities and chase the quarterback. Patrick Surtain will go after an interception instead of allowing a short catch. They say the past doesn't matter, but they play like they're aware of it."

Enter Seau, a 12-time Pro Bowl selection with the San Diego Chargers. Though he has lost some of his quickness, the 34-year-old Seau is the best weakside linebacker Miami has had in years. More important, he's a leader who insists that everybody around him play at full speed, whether at the start of the season or the end. Since 1996 Miami is an impressive 20–8 in the first four games of the season, but the Dolphins also haven't won more than two of their last four regular-season games since 1995. "We all have great credentials, but we have to leave those things behind when we hit the field," says Seau. "If we work as a unit, we can be pretty special."

But ultimately the burden rests on Wannstedt. His critics perceive him as a coaching retread who has benefited from his friendship with the man he succeeded in Miami, Johnson. "Dave's career record speaks for itself," the AFC executive says of Wannstedt's 71–73 mark. The connection to Johnson dates to 1977, when the two were assistants at Pitt. Two years later Johnson hired Wannstedt as an assistant at Oklahoma State. The two also worked together when Johnson was in charge at the University of Miami, but it was with the Dallas Cowboys that Wannstedt made a name for himself—as defensive coordinator for Johnson's 1992 Super Bowl champs. Wannstedt then went to Chicago, and after being fired he wasn't out of work long. Johnson brought him to the Dolphins as assistant head coach in '99, and when Johnson retired after that season, he recommended his friend for the job.

Wannstedt doesn't have Don Shula's aura or Johnson's ruthlessness; he's a humble man who remains true to his western Pennsyl-

vanian roots. He's industrious like his grandfather, a coal miner, and his father, a mill worker. He's a devout Catholic and a devoted family man. If Wannstedt has a difficult day, he'll read Scripture or jog a few miles to clear his mind. "It's not that pressure doesn't bother Dave, he just doesn't lose his perspective," says Baltimore Ravens offensive coordinator

NEW CREW In the off-season Wannstedt brought in Knight (left), Seau (55) and Griese to help him get back to the playoffs.



"We all like Dave, but he has a difficult job ahead," says Gadsden. "He has to get us all on the same page, and that HAS TO HAPPEN FAST."

Matt Cavanaugh, who held the same post under Wannstedt in Chicago and played at Pitt when Wannstedt was an assistant there. "He maintains his confidence."

Wannstedt is far more poised and relaxed than he ever was in Chicago, where he was so obsessed with micromanaging that he didn't build a relationship with his players. "I had guys like [All-Pros] Shaun Gayle, Richard Dent, Steve McMichael, and I should've spent more time with them," he says. "People need to have a clear picture of what you're after because when you communicate that, you get better results. But I thought I could build a Super Bowl team in four years. We did it in Dallas, and I thought it would be easy."

As Cavanaugh recalls, "Dave wanted all the

control when he got to Chicago, and he found out that can be pretty demanding. He learned that he can't do everything and that he had to trust people. That's the big change I've seen in him in Miami: He's focused on motivating people and getting them ready to play, and he relies on other people to do their jobs."

Wannstedt had to make tough decisions when he took over in Miami, most notably pushing Dan Marino out the door. He started quarterback Jay Fiedler and running back Lamar Smith when nobody believed in them, and in his first year he accomplished something that Johnson never did—win the AFC East. He also evolved into more of a player's coach. Now Wannstedt talks so frequently with his veterans that, Thomas says, "sometimes I think he listens to us too much."

Injuries were partly to blame for last season's collapse—the passing game fizzled when Fiedler was sidelined for six weeks in October and November with a broken right thumb—but the Dolphins also didn't make enough clutch plays. Missing the playoffs was devastating for Wannstedt. He couldn't watch postseason games. He couldn't enjoy a January trip to the Bahamas, wandering off one afternoon, so deep in thought that he got lost on a trail. After he made

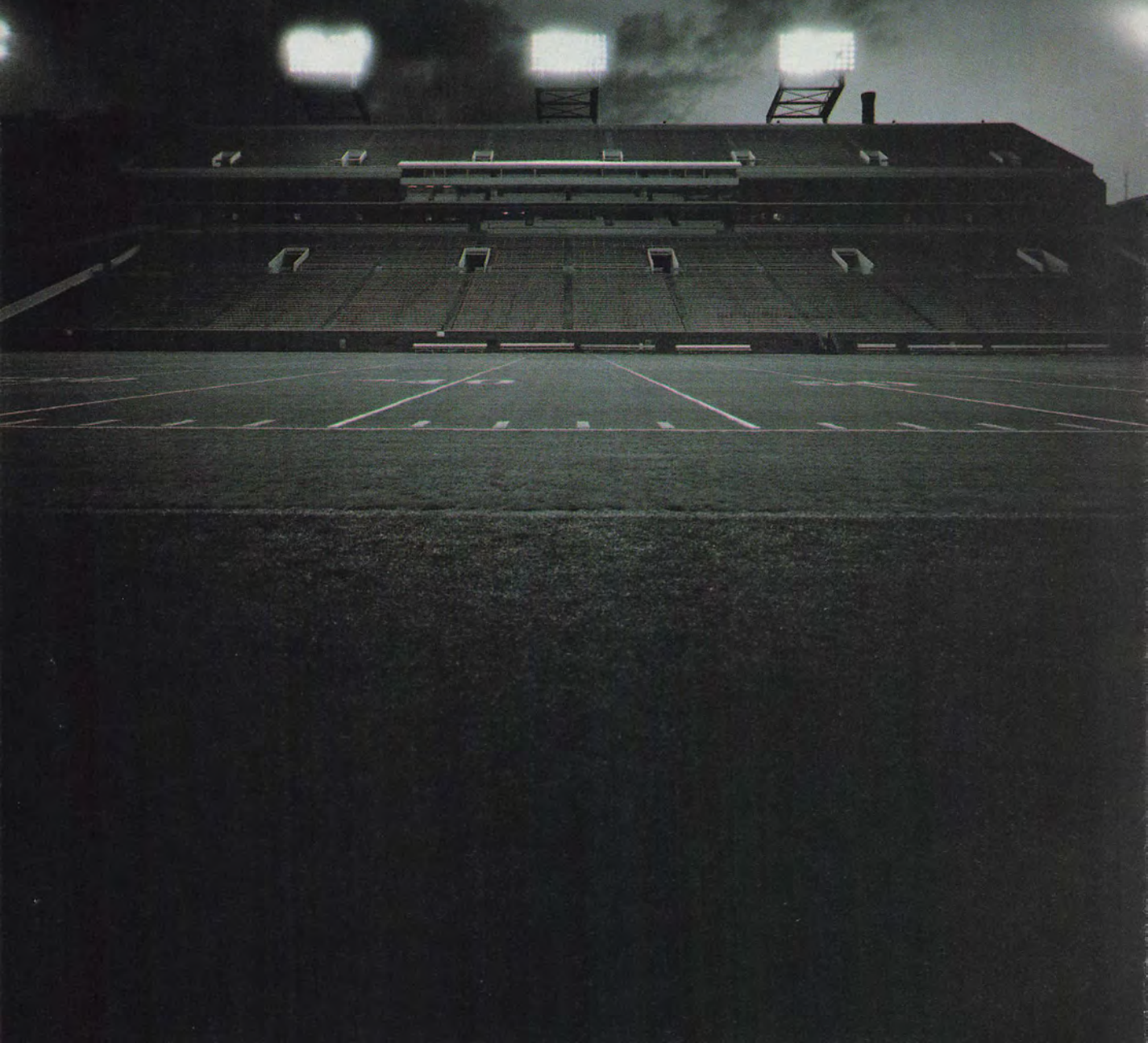
his way to a road, he flagged a passing truck and got a ride back to his hotel.

It wasn't until Miami's first minicamp, in early May, that Wann-

stedt was able to put last season behind him. Being around the players helped, as did seeing the squad's reaction to the off-season acquisitions. "We sent a message," he says. "They could see that things were flying."

In a meeting room off his office hangs a banner that reads, WHY WILL WE BE A BETTER TEAM? WHAT AM I DOING BETTER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE? Every day Wannstedt searches for new answers. "Sometimes you have to deal with adversity to achieve greatness," he says. "It will be interesting to talk about this team five months from now, because I want to see if our pain and disappointment has been channeled in the right direction. I truly believe that energy will be a powerful thing." □

where is football town?

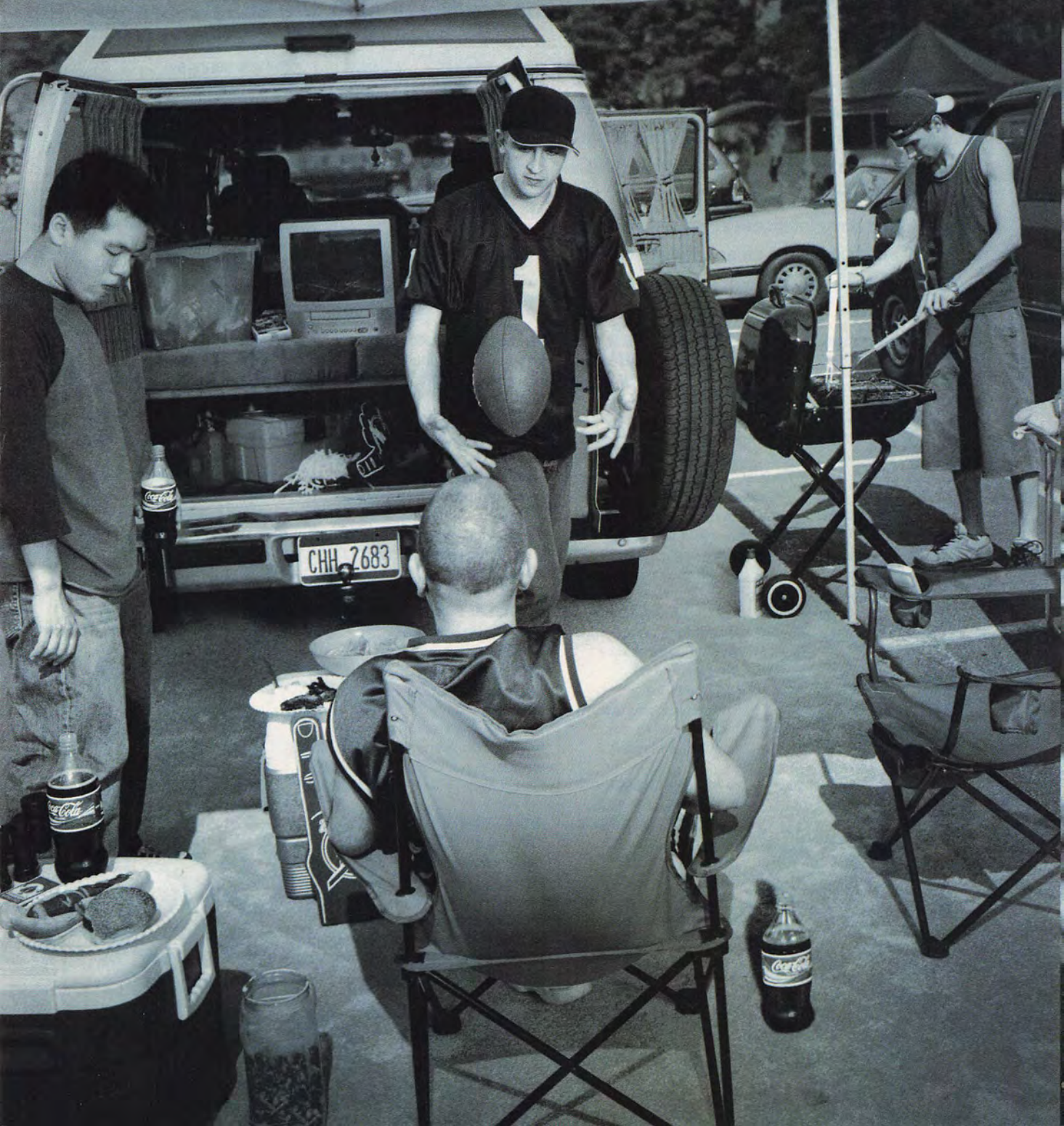


where is football town? fourth and inches.



Coca-Cola
Real

where is football town? five hours before gates open.



COOL Under

When a game is on the line, these pros are the best in the business when time

WHO WOULD you like to have running the ball on fourth-and-inches with the clock winding down? Or trying to stop that runner? Who are the NFL's best performers in crunch time, when the pressure is the most intense? I've selected a roster of players and coaches, even an official, who are at their best in a tight game's dying moments.

BRETT FAVRE
Packers QB



QUARTERBACK ON THIRD-AND-LONG, WHEN THE CLOCK IS YOUR ENEMY AND YOU'RE OUT OF TIMEOUTS: BRETT FAVRE, PACKERS

You need the gun, the ability to jam the ball into small areas, the courage to take a chance. On patterns such as the 16-yard comeback or the deep corner route, Favre and the Giants' Kerry Collins can get more velocity on their passes than anyone. The more speed on the pass, the less chance of an interception—and, yes, a greater chance that it could be dropped. But remember, this is third down, and there's another play left.

QUARTERBACK ON THIRD-AND-REAL-LONG (18 YARDS OR MORE): MICHAEL VICK, FALCONS

The odds on completing a third-and-18 pass are slim, so you have to have the running threat back there. Who knows what effect his recent injury will have on his



JEFF GARCIA, 49ERS QB

flamboyant style, but I expect he will pick up where he left off. He can take off and go for the first down himself—especially against a defense that's on its heels—or take off, pull up at the line and throw. In the game against the Steelers in which he brought the Falcons back from a 17-point, fourth-quarter deficit, Vick converted third-down situations with 22, 23 and 24 yards to go.

QUARTERBACK ON FOURTH-AND-LONG: JEFF GARCIA, 49ERS

He'll run if he has to and dive for the first down. In a one-play scenario, in which the margin for error is zero, I'll take Garcia over Vick on experience.

QUARTERBACK TO RUN THE TWO-MINUTE DRILL: GARCIA

A few years ago I'd have said Favre, but over the last two seasons Garcia has proved to be the master. I counted six games in 2001 and '02 in which he led the Niners to victory in the two-minute offense. During the same period, Favre had only two such wins.

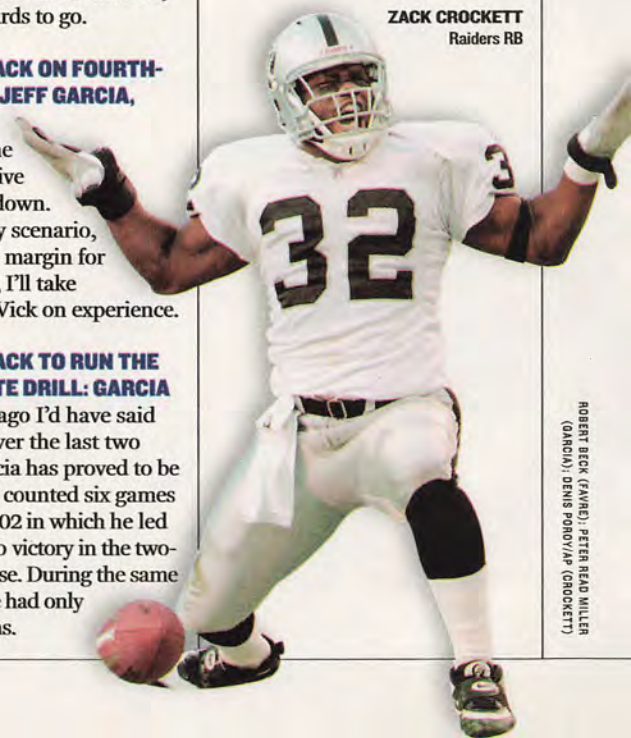
RUNNING BACK ON FOURTH-AND-INCHES: ZACK CROCKETT, RAIDERS

He has made the short-yardage situation his speciality. Everyone knows he's going to get the ball. Try to stop him. "It's so difficult to do what he does," coach Bill Callahan says. "Whether or not the play is blocked, he's going to try to run through people. And he does run through people."

LINEMAN TO RUN BEHIND: HANK FRALEY, EAGLES CENTER

This depends on where you want to run the ball. I choose the middle, rather than off tackle, to avoid having the runner make a cut. At one time Cowboys guard Larry Allen would have been the no-brainer pick, but last year

ZACK CROCKETT
Raiders RB



ROBERT BECK (FAVRE), PETER READ MILLER (GARCIA), DENIS POND/AP (CROCKETT)

Fire

is running out **BY PAUL ZIMMERMAN**



CORY SCHLESINGER, LIONS FB

he was slowed by shoulder and ankle injuries, along with excess poundage. Fraley is a straight-ahead banger with real punch, especially late in the game.

BLOCKING BACK TO RUN BEHIND: CORY SCHLESINGER, LIONS FULLBACK

He turned in one of the finest performances of 2002 in Detroit's upset of the Bears last October. Playing with a cracked vertebra, Schlesinger made

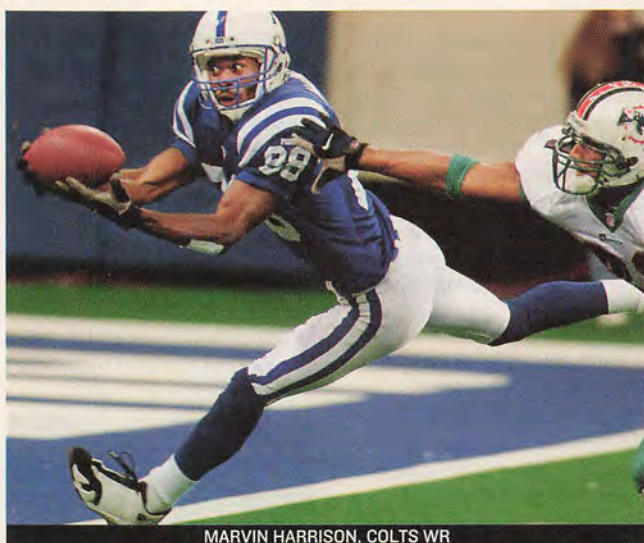
All-Pro linebacker Brian Urlacher his personal target, and the result was a career-high 172 yards rushing for James Stewart.

RECEIVER TO MAKE A THIRD-DOWN CATCH AGAINST DOUBLE COVERAGE: MARVIN HARRISON, COLTS

Harrison led the league last season with 44 third-down catches—14 more than his closest pursuer, the 49ers' Terrell Owens—and most of them were against two defenders. "Anyone can catch the ball in single coverage," Harrison says. "The fun part comes when you have to beat two guys."

RECEIVER TO GO DEEP—A BURNER WITH GOOD HANDS, SIZE AND LEAPING ABILITY: RANDY MOSS, VIKINGS

"Anybody knows you'd go with Moss," says Packers safety Darren Sharper. Adds a personnel director who doesn't



MARVIN HARRISON, COLTS WR

want to be named, "I hate the guy, and it really pains me to pick him for anything, but is there really anyone else?"

OUTSIDE PASS RUSHER WHO CAN BEAT THE DOUBLE TEAM: JASON TAYLOR, DOLPHINS DEFENSIVE END

Early in the game I'd take the Giants' Michael Strahan, because he's probably the closest to being technically perfect. But in the late going, when fatigue kicks in, Taylor's motor won't quit. He might appear to be blocked, he might even get knocked off his feet, but if the quarterback pulls the ball down and looks for that one last read, Taylor's going to be on him.

BEST ONE-ON-ONE OUTSIDE PASS RUSHER: SIMEON RICE, BUCS DEFENSIVE END

He lines up very wide and takes a long, circuitous route to the outside, which he can get away with because of his speed. Then, when he has his blocker set up just right, he flashes to the inside and gets the quick sack.

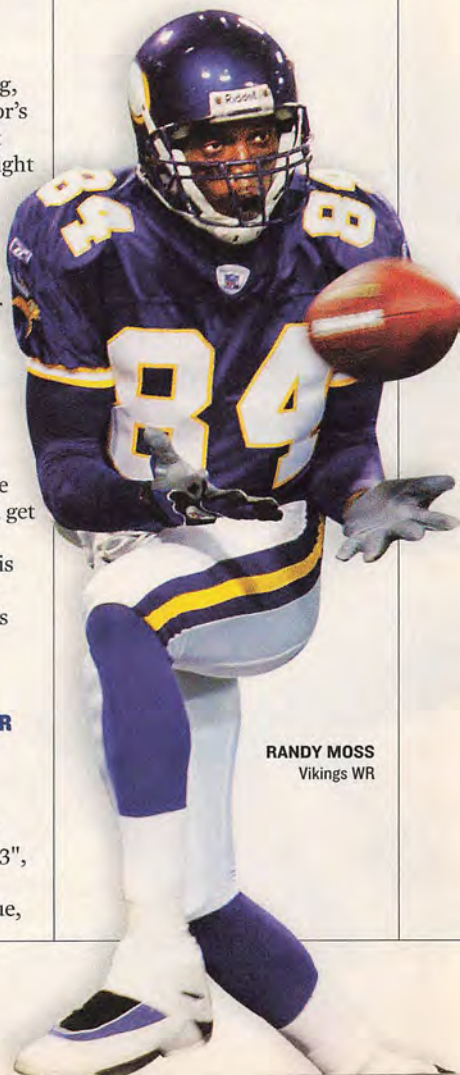
TACKLE TO HANDLE THE PREMIER OUTSIDE RUSHER WITH NO HELP: DERRICK DEESE, 49ERS

He's a tough guy, a player who'll do anything to avoid getting beaten. Deese, at 6' 3", 289 pounds, is one of the smallest tackles in the league,

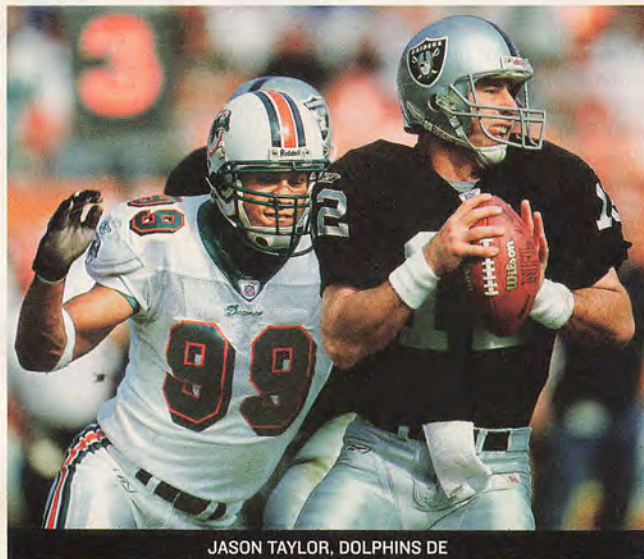
but late in the game I'll take a smaller player over a 350-pound monster whose legs will be rubbery.

PASS RUSHER TO GO FOR THE STRIP: LEONARD LITTLE, RAMS DEFENSIVE END

He's not as effective against the double team, but he forced



RANDY MOSS
Vikings WR



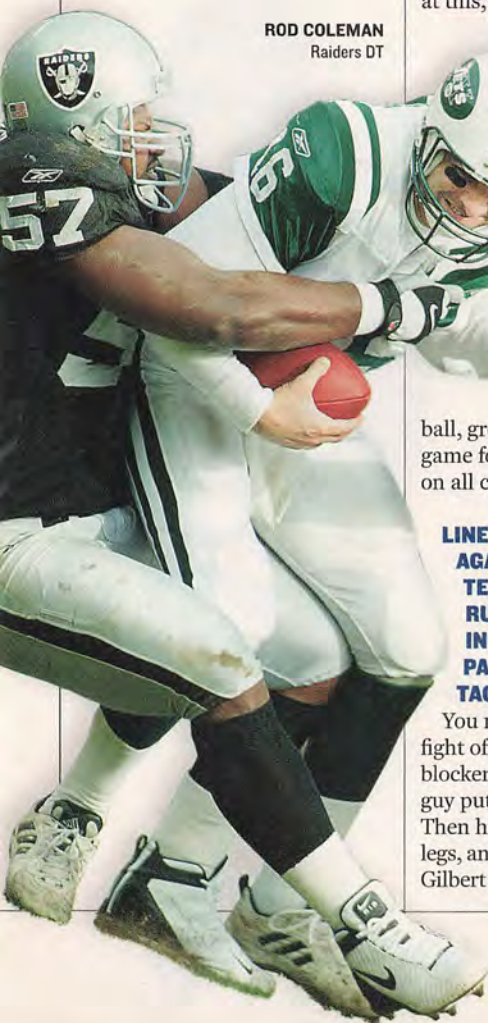
JASON TAYLOR, DOLPHINS DE

nine fumbles last season and came close a lot of other times. He almost changed the ending to Super Bowl XXXVI, when he reached Tom Brady during the Patriots' winning field goal drive and smacked the ball. But Brady held on to it and completed the short pass to J.R. Redmond that kept the drive alive.

**INSIDE RUSHER TO GET TO THE QUARTERBACK:
ROD COLEMAN, RAIDERS
DEFENSIVE TACKLE**

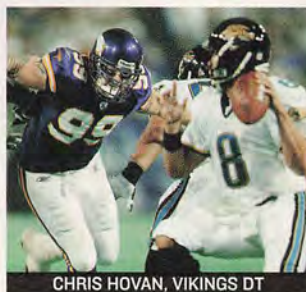
Last season big Sam Adams started the game, but in crunch time Coleman was on the field applying the serious pressure inside. Exceptionally quick off the ball, and undersized for a defensive tackle at 6' 2", 285 pounds, he still wears number 57 from his days as a linebacker. His 11 sacks were tops for all interior linemen last season, which is remarkable when you consider that he started only two games.

ROD COLEMAN
Raiders DT



**BLITZER TO COMPLEMENT
THE RUSH OF THE FRONT
FOUR: BRIAN DAWKINS,
EAGLES FREE SAFETY**

You've got to love this job to do it. You've got to be a defensive lineman in a DB's body. You've got to have speed and a killer instinct, because if you're crafty enough and time your blitz just right, you might get a free shot at the passer. Lawyer Milloy of the Patriots excels in this area, but Dawkins is the master.



CHRIS HOVAN, VIKINGS DT

**INTERIOR LINEMAN TO HIT
THE GAP AND CREATE HAVOC:
CHRIS HOVAN, VIKINGS
DEFENSIVE TACKLE**

Warren Sapp of the Bucs is good at this, but not if he has to contend with too many bodies. The Saints' Grady Jackson is probably the best at it, but by the fourth quarter he has the oxygen mask on.

What we need here is a burst off the ball, great leverage and late-game fortitude. Hovan qualifies on all counts.

**LINEMAN TO STAND FIRM
AGAINST THE DOUBLE
TEAM AND STUFF THE
RUN ON FOURTH-AND-
INCHES: KRIS JENKINS,
PANTHERS DEFENSIVE
TACKLE**

You need a big, strong guy to fight off 700 pounds of blockers, and sometimes that guy puts on too much weight. Then his stamina goes, then his legs, and pretty soon he's a Gilbert Brown—able to stuff the



ANTOINE WINFIELD, BILLS CB

occasional early play, but a nonfactor in the final moments. At 6' 4", 315 pounds, Jenkins is just the right size to hold the point. In coach John Fox's beautifully coordinated defense, which ranked second in the league last season, Jenkins is the fulcrum.

**LINEBACKER TO STUFF THE
RUN ON FOURTH-AND-
INCHES: EDGERTON
HARTWELL, RAIDERS**

"The Sluggo linebacker is a dying breed," says Mike Giddings, who runs Pro Scout Inc., a personnel service for 15 NFL teams. "It's all speed now." And, yes, I had trouble finding the throwback linebacker who could fight through the blocks of the guards and center. The Ravens' Ray Lewis, the most gifted middle linebacker of this era, runs around blocks to penetrate and make the big play. The Bears' Urlacher, a unanimous All-Pro last year, plays it soft in short-yardage situations. For my purposes it came down to Hartwell, a 6' 1", 250-pound fireplug, over the Broncos' Al Wilson. Hartwell is the hardest to budge.

**CORNERBACK FOR
MAN-TO-MAN
COVERAGE WITH NO
HELP: ANTOINE
WINFIELD, BILLS**

I thought the Bucs' Ronde Barber was the best corner in the NFL in 2002, but in the nickel he went inside and Dwight

Smith was alone on the corner. Winfield, built like former All-Pro Darrell Green at 5' 9", 180 pounds, might get beaten on occasion, but he'll pound his fist on the ground, grit his teeth, and for the next three or four plays he'll be glued to his man. With the game on the line there's no way Winfield would give up a completion.

**KICK RETURNER:
DANTE HALL, CHIEFS**

Are some better than others late in the game? Yes. The good ones have that extra burst when the stakes are highest. That's Hall—"the best return man I've ever been around," says his coach, Dick Vermeil.

**PUNT RETURNER:
BRIAN MITCHELL, GIANTS**

I want a guy who won't fumble. Mitchell has been at it for so many years (13 seasons, 434 returns), at



DANTE HALL
Chiefs KR

such a high level, that I'd feel secure with him back there. But there's another way of looking at this situation, and that is when you have to have a punt return for a touchdown. I'll take the Jets' Santana Moss. He's the most gifted, the niftiest and the scariest return man of them all.



BRIAN MITCHELL, GIANTS PR

SPECIAL TEAMS PLAYER TO MAKE A TACKLE: JERALD SOWELL, JETS

"You look at special-teamers," says the Jets' Mike Westhoff, who coaches them, "and two guys might have the same size and speed, but one of them has the knack for making the play and the other doesn't. Sowell has that knack."

PUNTER TO HANG ONE HIGH AND DEEP FROM THE SHADOW OF HIS END ZONE: CHRIS MOHR, FALCONS

I came up with a ranking system for this, based on the 160

games I saw last year. Any punt from inside a team's 10-yard line with a hang time of at least 4.4 seconds and a net gain of 40 yards or better got a positive, and any punt from inside the 10 that failed in either category got a negative. Mohr led my list with 11 positives and one negative. Tied for second were the Chargers' Darren Bennett and the Bills' Brian Moorman with six positives, and both of them had a couple of negatives.

PUNTER TO PIN THE ENEMY INSIDE ITS 10-YARD LINE: JEFF FEAGLES, GIANTS

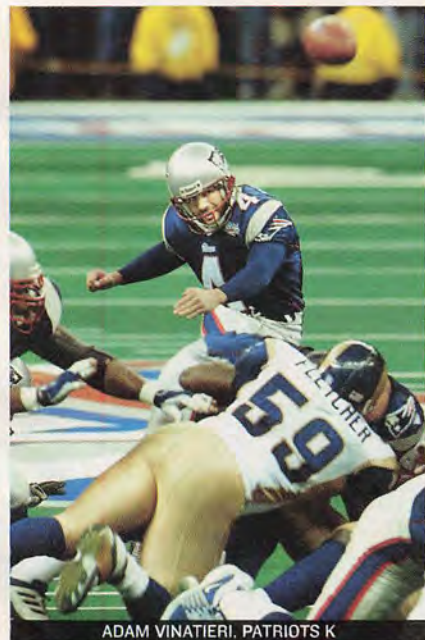
"As you get older," says Feagles, who's entering his 16th NFL season, "your hang time comes down, but you get smarter—you get better at placing the ball. Then, when you're all brains and no hang time, you become a coach." With the Seahawks last year he boomed a 50-yard, 5.09 hanger against the Giants that went out of bounds at the New York four. Then, in the fourth quarter, his 56-yarder backed up and died at the Giants' five. New York had a total of one yard in punt returns that day, and coach Jim Fassel had seen enough. When Feagles became a free agent, the Giants were first in line with a five-year, \$4.3-million contract that included a \$500,000 bonus.

FIELD GOAL KICKER TO WIN THE GAME: ADAM VINATIERI, PATRIOTS

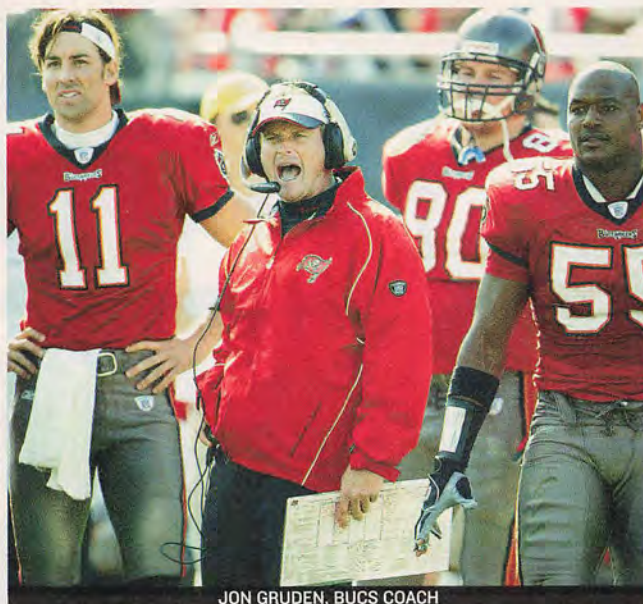
Who else but the hero of Super Bowl XXXVI? He hasn't lost his touch.

COACH WHO WON'T PANIC: ANDY REID, EAGLES

What you want is a guy who won't butcher the two-minute drill or get flustered with the game on the line, and who will let his assistants coach. I think of Reid and I picture a great calm in the midst of a storm.



ADAM VINATIERI, PATRIOTS K



JON GRUDEN, BUCS COACH

OFFENSIVE COACH TO MAKE THE DYNAMIC CALLS: JON GRUDEN, BUCS

My game, my rules, so I'm allowed to count head coaches who concentrate on one side of the ball. One personnel director summed up Gruden best: "He's the guy you want at the end because he'll always go to his best option. He'll always know what's going to give him the best chance in that situation." For one cockamamie play call, though, I'd give Steelers offensive coordinator Mike Mularkey the nod.

DEFENSIVE COACH TO COME UP WITH AN INNOVATIVE AND EFFECTIVE ADJUSTMENT: BILL BELICHICK, PATRIOTS

The obvious choice would be Bucs defensive coordinator Monte Kiffin, who's very sound in his game planning. But we're talking late in the game here—adjustments, imagination—and Belichick always has dared to be different. "You never know what he'll come up with in any situation," says his inside linebacker, Tedy Bruschi. "Sometimes it's as much a surprise to us as it is to the other team."

For more analysis from Paul Zimmerman, check out Dr. Z's NFL Insider at si.com.

OFFICIAL WHO WON'T CHOKER: JIM QUIRK, UMPIRE

A ball of fire. He keeps things going, gets the ball spotted in a hurry, keeps those annoying officials' conferences moving in snappy fashion. He's always on top of his game. □



ANDY REID
Eagles coach

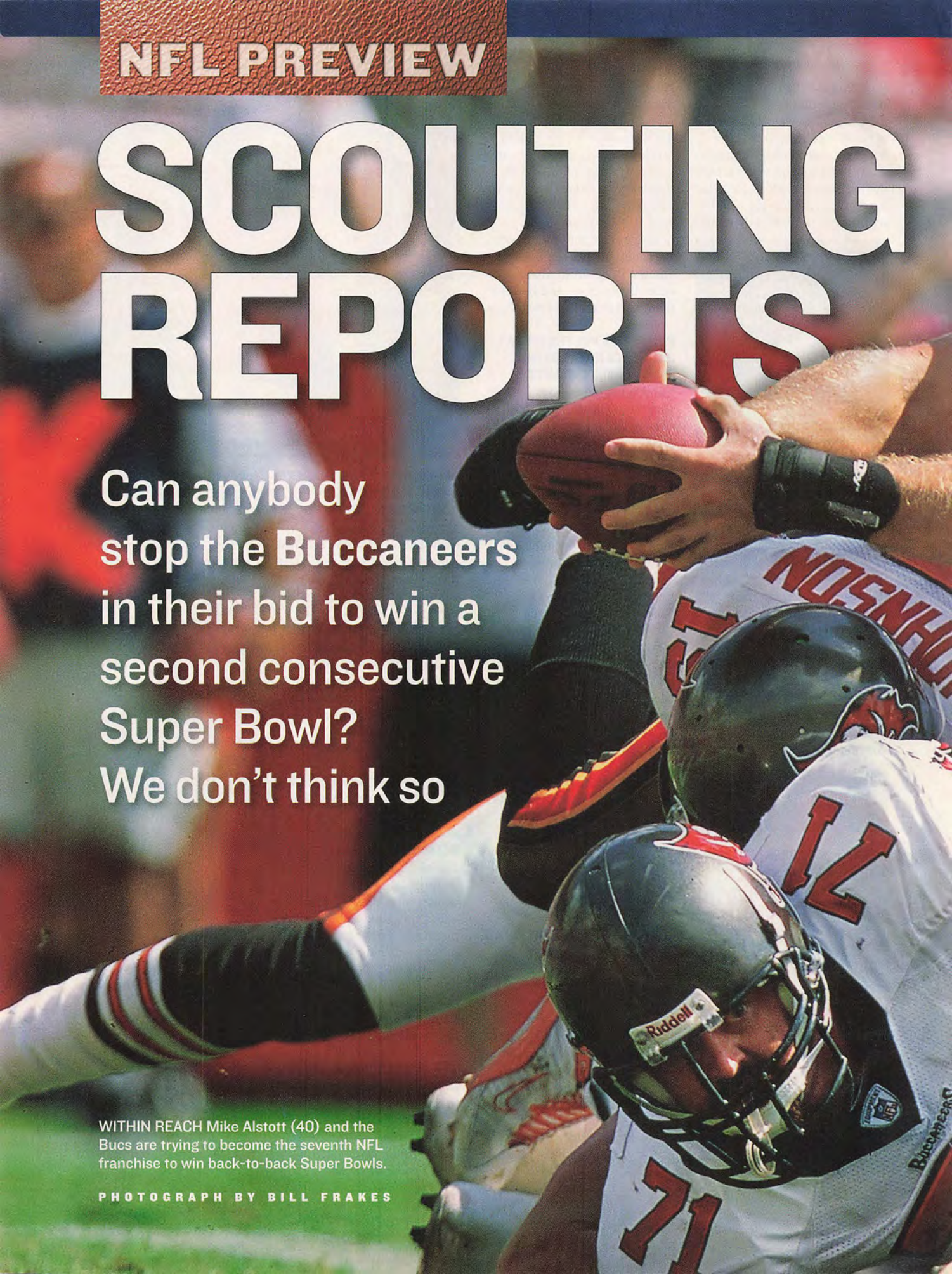
NFL PREVIEW

SCOUTING REPORTS

Can anybody
stop the **Buccaneers**
in their bid to win a
second consecutive
Super Bowl?
We don't think so

WITHIN REACH Mike Alstott (40) and the Bucs are trying to become the seventh NFL franchise to win back-to-back Super Bowls.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BILL FRAKES





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SCOUTING REPORTS

Dr. Z's Forecast

POWER RANKINGS

- 1 Buccaneers
- 2 Eagles
- 3 Titans
- 4 Rams
- 5 Packers
- 6 Steelers
- 7 Chiefs
- 8 Bills
- 9 Raiders
- 10 Patriots
- 11 Giants
- 12 Dolphins
- 13 49ers
- 14 Colts
- 15 Falcons
- 16 Broncos
- 17 Chargers
- 18 Jets
- 19 Saints
- 20 Browns
- 21 Ravens
- 22 Seahawks
- 23 Panthers
- 24 Vikings
- 25 Jaguars
- 26 Bears
- 27 Cowboys
- 28 Redskins
- 29 Lions
- 30 Bengals
- 31 Texans
- 32 Cardinals

PLAYER VALUE RANKINGS (PVR)

We ranked the NFL's offensive backs, receivers, kickers and return men from 1 (the best) to 500, based on our projections of their statistical production this season. The categories considered were scoring (touchdowns, field goals, extra points), long scoring plays (25 yards or more), big-game potential (300 yards passing or 100 yards rushing or receiving) and passing efficiency. We also took into account each player's career statistics as well as his role on the team, prospect for improving or declining, injury history and physical condition. Using these criteria, we determined the player value ranking (PVR), which appears under the player's name in his team's projected starting lineup.

Projected lineups and PVRs compiled by David Sabino

SI.COM For the complete list of PVRs, go to si.com/fantasy. For scores, team pages, rosters and individual and team statistics, plus the latest news and analysis from Peter King and Paul Zimmerman, go to si.com/football.



PRIEST HOLMES
Chiefs RB

HOW THEY'LL FINISH

NFC NORTH PROJECTED RECORD

Packers (5)	10-6
Vikings (24)	6-10
Bears (26)	6-10
Lions (29)	5-11

NFC SOUTH

Buccaneers (1)	12-4
Falcons (15)	9-7
Saints (19)	8-8
Panthers (23)	7-9

NFC EAST

Eagles (2)	11-5
Giants* (11)	10-6
Cowboys (27)	5-11
Redskins (28)	5-11

NFC WEST

Rams (4)	11-5
49ers* (13)	9-7
Seahawks (22)	8-8
Cardinals (32)	4-12

AFC NORTH

Steelers (6)	10-6
Browns (20)	7-9
Ravens (21)	7-9
Bengals (30)	5-11

AFC SOUTH

Titans (3)	10-6
Colts (14)	9-7
Jaguars (25)	6-10
Texans (31)	4-12

AFC EAST

Bills (8)	10-6
Patriots* (10)	10-6
Dolphins (12)	9-7
Jets (18)	7-9

AFC WEST

Chiefs (7)	10-6
Raiders* (9)	9-7
Broncos (16)	9-7
Chargers (17)	8-8

Overall rank in parentheses *Wild-card team

WILD-CARD PLAYOFFS

- NFC** Rams over 49ers
Giants over Packers
- AFC** Chiefs over Raiders
Patriots over Bills

DIVISIONAL PLAYOFFS

- NFC** Buccaneers over Giants
Eagles over Rams
- AFC** Chiefs over Titans
Steelers over Patriots

CHAMPIONSHIP GAMES

- NFC** Buccaneers over Eagles
- AFC** Chiefs over Steelers

SUPER BOWL XXXVIII

Buccaneers 27, Chiefs 20

NFC
NORTH

1

GREEN BAY

Packers

Another division crown is in the offing, but the defense must show it's championship caliber

IT WAS almost midnight last Jan. 5 when the effects of an emotionally wrenching month began to seem too much for Packers defensive end Kaber Gbaja-Biamila. The night before, the Packers had lost a wild-card playoff game to the Falcons at Lambeau Field, the first postseason home defeat in the franchise's 84-year history. The loss came on the heels of the death of his mother, Bola, who was killed in a one-car accident in Los Angeles on Dec. 1—the same day his wife, Eileen, had given birth to the couple's first child, Abdul-Rashid—and Gbaja-Biamila became distraught.

He got into his car and began tearing down the streets of Green Bay, running red light after red light. "I thought nothing mattered anymore," he says. "I know it was ridiculous, but I'd lost control." Green Bay being what it is, he soon ran out of intersections, and he returned home. There, he sat in his garage and cried.

Many nights with the Bible have since helped the devoutly Christian Gbaja-Biamila (pronounced BAH-jah BEE-ah-MIL-lah) right his ship. That's crucial because he's a key figure in fixing the weakness that haunted last year's Packers, who were not as strong as their 12-4 record might indicate. Green Bay buried its NFC North rivals by Halloween, but as the wins

piled up, so did the injuries along the defensive line. The starting front four lost 23 games to injury; only twice did its best quartet suit up for the same game.

Though Green Bay's defense forced the most turnovers in the league, its attacking style, when executed by a patchwork line, too often resulted in uncovered gaps

and blown assignments. As a result the Packers allowed 4.84 yards a carry (only the Seahawks were worse) and 124.9 rushing yards per game, their highest total

SACK MAN Gbaja-Biamila still must prove that he can stop the run, but he already knows how to flatten quarterbacks.

ALLEN FREDRICKSON/REUTERS



UNDER THE GUN

► It was a gruesome sight: Left tackle **CHAD CLIFTON** was leveled on a block by Bucs defensive tackle Warren Sapp during an interception return last Nov. 24, then lay motionless with a severely sprained pelvis. No team relies more on a single player than the Pack does on Brett Favre; to help keep him upright, Clifton must play like a Pro Bowler.

since 1990. "Even after a win, as a D-line it felt like a loss," says defensive tackle Cletidus Hunt. "We just wore down."

Meanwhile the stunning 27-7 loss to the Falcons was just the final blow to Cheesehead Nation, which earlier had been shaken by quarterback Brett Favre's intimations that his retirement is nigh. Though he returns this season (looking as spry as ever), the time for a last push in the Favre era is now. To do that the team will count on a retooled, reinvigorated defensive front led by Gbaja-Biamila—fitting for a man whose name in his parents' native Nigeria means "Big Man Come and Save Me." "Other teams don't want to see him on the field," says Packers defensive coordinator Ed Donatell. "With mobile QBs and constant substitution, you need a dominant, hybrid linebacker like Kabear."

There's no question that Gbaja-Biamila, in his fourth year out of San Diego State, can be a disruptive force. Playing almost exclusively on passing downs in 2001, he had 13½ sacks; pressed into full-time duty last season, he again led the team, with 12. He struggled with his presnap adjustments, though, and at 255 pounds he labored to shed blocks. "I was undisciplined," says Gbaja-Biamila, who has a new seven-year, \$37.3 million deal. "Now I'm ready. Playing the run isn't just a skill, it's an attitude."

With Gbaja-Biamila entrenched at right end, Joe Johnson, last year's big free-agent acquisition who suffered a season-ending tear to his left triceps in Week 5, will replace the departed Vonnie Holliday at left end. Joining Hunt at tackle will be the ageless Gilbert Brown, returning for his 10th year. Rookie Nick Barnett, a first-round draft pick out of Oregon State, is being penciled in at middle linebacker, while All-Pro safety Darren Sharper leads the secondary. "We wanted to get faster on defense, and we did," coach Mike Sherman says. "We've won 24 games in the last two years. We'll be fine."

As for the other big question mark in Green Bay, Sherman made a trip to Hattiesburg, Miss., in March to visit Favre. Recalling the conversation during the early days of training camp, Sherman said the two talked "about everything." So Favre isn't retiring anytime soon? "Everything," repeated Sherman, who leaned hard into his chair with a smile that suggested it wouldn't be too soon.

—Josh Elliott

ENEMY LINES

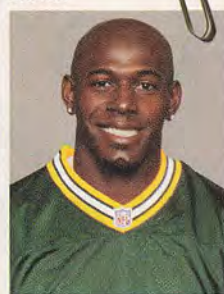
An opposing scout's view

I like what **Mike Sherman** is building. In **Mark Hatley** he's got a personnel guy he trusts, and his coaching and organizational skills have been great. Then again, a high school team could've gone 12-4 in the NFC North last year. . . . If **Brett Favre** goes down, they're screwed. He's as good as they come, except in the playoffs. Then he seems to get a little erratic, like he's pressing. But he's the class of the league. . . . **Donald Driver** shocked the hell out of me last year. He's always had the skill, but he got a lot better in traffic. . . . **Mike Flanagan** making the move from center

"Maybe they overpaid Gbaja-Biamila, but he's gotten better every year and will again."

to tackle was as impressive as any performance in the league last season. But the line is still a big question mark. How healthy are those two tackles [**Mark Tauscher** and **Chad Clifton**]? . . . Maybe they overpaid **Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila**, but he's gotten better every year and will again. He's like a young Jason Taylor. . . . The linebackers will be O.K., as will the secondary. But [safety] **Marques Anderson** fell off after a hot start last year. He made too many mental errors. . . . They're still the class of the division. No one will challenge them. Until the playoffs, that is.

DRIVER



SCHEDULE

Sept. 7	MINNESOTA
14	DETROIT
21	at Arizona
29	at Chicago (Mon.)
Oct. 5	SEATTLE
12	KANSAS CITY
19	at St. Louis
26	Open date
Nov. 2	at Minnesota
10	PHILADELPHIA (Mon.)
16	at Tampa Bay
23	SAN FRANCISCO
27	at Detroit (Thurs.)
Dec. 7	CHICAGO
14	at San Diego
22	at Oakland (Mon.)
28	DENVER

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 30
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .449
Games against playoff teams: 4

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics



2002 RECORD: 12-4

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 12/10/12
DEFENSE 21/3/12

COACH: Mike Sherman;
fourth season with
Green Bay (33-15 in NFL)

AHMAN GREEN

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	20	286	1,240	4.3
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
57	393	6.9	9	

BRETT FAVRE

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	18	551	341	61.9
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
3,658	27	16	85.6	

WILLIAM HENDERSON

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	185	7	27	3.9
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
26	168	6.5	4	

DONALD DRIVER

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	51	70	1,064	9

BUBBA FRANKS

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	109	54	442	7

CHAD CLIFTON

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 5"	330 lbs.	10	9

MIKE WAHLE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 6"	307 lbs.	16	16

MIKE FLANAGAN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 5"	297 lbs.	16	13

MARCO RIVERA

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 4"	310 lbs.	16	16

MARK TAUSCHER

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 4"	320 lbs.	2	2

ROBERT FERGUSON

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	152	22	293	3

DEFENSE

RE	KABEAR GBAJA-BIAMILA	46 tackles	12 sacks
RT	CLETIDUS HUNT	36 tackles	5½ sacks
LT	GILBERT BROWN	27 tackles	0 sacks
LE	JOE JOHNSON	10 tackles	2 sacks
OLB	HANNIBAL NAVIES	32 tackles	0 sacks
MLB	NICK BARNETT (R)	121 tackles	6 sacks
OLB	NATIL DIGGS	84 tackles	3 sacks
CB	AL HARRIS	24 tackles	1 int.
SS	ANTUAN EDWARDS	39 tackles	0 int.
FS	DARREN SHARPER	68 tackles	7 int.
CB	MIKE MCKENZIE	66 tackles	2 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS

PVR				
K	RYAN LONGWELL	169	44/44 XPs	28/34 FGs
PR	ANTONIO CHATMAN (R)	399	22 ret.	78 avg.
KR	ANTONIO CHATMAN (R)	399	24 ret.	19.8 avg.
P	JOSH BIDWELL		79 punts	41.7 avg.

NFC
NORTH

2

MINNESOTA Vikings

The lack of a breakaway back could make it hard for Daunte Culpepper to stay out of harm's way

HE CAN still hear the sickening crack, followed by the dull thud of his quarterback hitting the ground, knocked senseless. In 2001 Doug Chapman was a young running back for the Vikings, playing in his first series in the NFL, at Chicago's Soldier Field. On the third play he spotted a Bears blitz and knew he had to help block a linebacker before rotating to an on-rushing cornerback. He chipped the linebacker, then hurried into his pass route, neglecting to take care of the blitzing corner. After two steps came the audible reminders of his blown assignment. "I'll never forget watching Daunte [Culpepper] lying there," says Chapman, wincing. "If you want to play running back in this league, stuff like that can't happen."

Ironically, "stuff like that" led coach Mike Tice to choose Chapman to replace injured Pro Bowl running back Michael Bennett, who—after a brilliant 1,296-yard sophomore season—landed awkwardly on a treadmill last March and suffered a stress fracture of his left foot. The injury has been slow to heal, prompting Bennett to undergo an experimental procedure that the team hopes will speed the recovery and allow him to return later this season.

If he cannot, it'll be quite a blow. Bennett helped soften defenses that regularly

swarmed the Vikings' patchwork line and made Culpepper miserable. Though Minnesota finished with the NFC's top-ranked offense, the numbers were deceiving. Too often Culpepper was forced to freelance, sometimes with disastrous results: He was sacked 47 times, threw 23 interceptions and lost nine fumbles. With no Bennett to

keep defenses honest, it falls to Chapman to at least help keep Culpepper in one piece.

"If Daunte has to run for his life, we're not going anywhere," says Tice. "When

AIRBORNE DISASTER Poor protection, small hands and some bad reads made Culpepper accident-prone last season.

BOB LEVERONE/TSN/ICON SM



UNDER THE GUN

► The Vikes struggled to get to the quarterback last year—just 27 sacks while giving up 256 passing yards a game. **CHRIS HOVAN**, a fourth-year tackle with a quick first step and a squat, tough-to-block 294-pound frame, was second on the team with 5½ sacks last season—a number he'll have to top if the secondary is to avoid being shredded again.

you see how many times Daunte never saw a hit coming, well. . . .” Tice’s voice trails off before he adds, “It was painful.”

Chapman’s competition for the role of Bennett’s replacement was rookie Onterio Smith, who looked like a steal as a fourth-round pick. A serviceable runner, Chapman proved in training camp that he was a superior blocker, earning him the nod over Smith, who will start the first couple of games while Chapman rehabs his sprained ankle. “I know Coach Tice had a tough decision, but I believe everything comes full circle,” Chapman says. “I’ve been preparing for this my whole career. This is my time.”

“Doug’s a fun guy to block for,” says Pro Bowl center Matt Birk. “He’s quick, he’s a bit of a slasher, and he’s been around for a while. Now it’s up to the O-line to get things started.” That’ll be easier than it was a year ago, when rookie left tackle Bryant McKinnie missed training camp and the first eight weeks of the season in a contract dispute. McKinnie’s absence forced his linemates to play out of position, and when he finally reported, the team had to slog through practices in full pads so McKinnie could catch up. “Bryant’s a different player this year,” Tice says. “He’s much quicker now.”

Stopping things, meanwhile, falls to a defense that was overhauled after a dreadful season in which it surrendered 361 yards and 27.6 points per game and forced a paltry 41 turnovers, second worst in the NFC. The addition of free-agent linebacker Chris Claiborne, formerly of the Lions, should help, as will the signing of ex-Broncos cornerback Denard Walker, an upgrade for the NFL’s fourth-worst pass defense.

Perhaps the most encouraging sign for Minnesota is that all-world wideout Randy Moss made nary a peep in the off-season and looked every bit his old, game-breaking self during the preseason. Though he caught a career-high 106 passes last year, Moss had only seven touchdown receptions. If the Vikings are to challenge Green Bay for the division title, Moss and Culpepper, who signed a 10-year, \$100 million extension in May, must play like the franchise players they’re paid to be.

For that to happen, Culpepper must remain steady . . . and upright long enough to find Moss. And that means Chapman can’t cut any more corners. He’ll just have to block them.

“Hovan has as fast a first step as any D-lineman; he’s great at shooting gaps.”

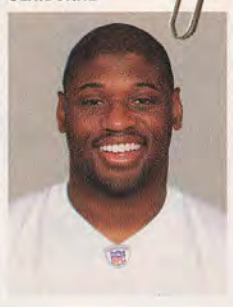
very good center, but **David Dixon** looks done, and **Mike Rosenthal** is average at best. . . . **Chris Hovan** has as fast a first step as any D-lineman in the league; he’s great at shooting gaps. . . . If **Chris Claiborne** stays trim, he’ll be a difference-maker at linebacker. . . . Linebacker **Greg Biekert** is smart, but he can’t run, and he struggles in coverage. . . . The secondary’s going to give **Mike Tice** fits. . . . **Randy Moss** is still the league’s best receiver when he’s got it going, so if the line keeps Culpepper healthy, they could get 10 wins. But with that defense, 8-8 is more likely.

ENEMY LINES

An opposing scout’s view

“They will miss [running back] Michael Bennett. He might’ve been the league’s fastest player last year, so defenses had to honor him when the Vikings spread the field. . . . **Daunte Culpepper** had an up-and-down year for several reasons. One, his line was in flux because of **Bryant McKinnie**’s holdout. Two, he missed [wide receiver] Cris Carter. And three, his small hands—when he’s hit from behind, that ball’s coming out. He’s still not a great reader of defenses, but he’s becoming a better pocket passer, and he’s still a load if he runs. . . . The offensive line is just O.K. **Matt Birk**’s a

CLAIBORNE



SCHEDULE

Sept. 7	at Green Bay
14	CHICAGO
21	at Detroit
28	SAN FRANCISCO
Oct. 5	at Atlanta
12	Open date
19	DENVER
26	N.Y. GIANTS
Nov. 2	GREEN BAY
9	at San Diego
16	at Oakland
23	DETROIT
30	at St. Louis
Dec. 7	SEATTLE
14	at Chicago
20	KANSAS CITY (Sat.)
28	at Arizona

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 24
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .479
Games against playoff teams: 6

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD: 6-10

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 1/9/2

DEFENSE 10/29/26

COACH: Mike Tice;
third season with
Minnesota (6-11 in NFL)

DOUG CHAPMAN

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	93	12	89	7.4
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
0	0	—	0	

DAUNTE CULPEPPER

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	37	549	333	60.7
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
3,853	18	23	75.3	

JIM KLEINSASSER

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	186	6	17	2.8
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
37	393	10.6	1	

RANDY MOSS

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	21	106	1,347	7

BYRON CHAMBERLAIN

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	217	34	389	0

BRYANT MCKINNIE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
OT	6' 8"	343 lbs.	8	7

CHRIS LIWIENSKI

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 5"	321 lbs.	16	16

MATT BIRK

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 4"	308 lbs.	16	16

DAVID DIXON

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 5"	359 lbs.	15	15

MIKE ROSENTHAL

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 7"	315 lbs.	16	16

D'WAYNE BATES

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	156	50	689	4

DEFENSE

RE	KENNY MIXON	71 tackles	4½ sacks
RT	FRED ROBBINS	61 tackles	7 sacks
LT	CHRIS HOVAN	52 tackles	5½ sacks
LE	KEVIN WILLIAMS (R)	61 tackles	7 sacks
OLB	CHRIS CLAIBORNE	101 tackles	4½ sacks
MLB	GREG BIEKERT	101 tackles	4 int.
OLB	HENRI CROCKETT	61 tackles	1 sack
CB	BRIAN WILLIAMS	37 tackles	1 int.
CB	COREY CHAVOUS	83 tackles	3 int.
SS	BRIAN RUSSELL	14 tackles	1 int.
CB	DENARD WALKER	64 tackles	1 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS

	PVR				
K	HAYDEN EPSTEIN	251	13/13 XPs	5/9 FGs	28 pts.
PR	KEENAN HOWRY (R)	405	32 ret.	14.3 avg.	2 TDs
KR	JOHN AVERY*	372	26 ret.	25.4 avg.	0 TDs
P	EDDIE JOHNSON (R)		51 punts	46.0 avg.	

■ New acquisition (R) Rookie (statistics for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 89) *CFL stats

NFC
NORTH

3

CHICAGO Bears

Kordell Stewart is confident he can spark a team that needs him as much as he needs them

THROUGHOUT TRAINING camp last year, Kordell Stewart, the perennially embattled Steelers quarterback, could sense the doubt creeping back into his coaches' minds, could feel their leash tightening, and he thought, Here we go again. Never mind that in 2001 he'd led Pittsburgh to the AFC Championship Game and finished fourth in the league MVP voting. Stewart knew that he would be benched come that first big mistake. "Before the season even started, the book was shut on my situation," says Stewart. "In Pittsburgh I had to play perfectly—and that wasn't realistic."

Sure enough, after he threw a costly end-zone interception in Week 4 against the Browns, Stewart lost his job to Tommy Maddox, whose play in leading the Steelers to a comeback win in that game sealed Stewart's fate with the franchise. Even when Stewart replaced an injured Maddox seven weeks later and led Pittsburgh to two wins, he knew he was auditioning for some other team. "I was ready to go," says Stewart, who was released last Feb. 26 after eight erratic seasons in Pittsburgh. "I know I have lots to prove. I wanted to go where they'd have my back."

In Chicago he thinks he has found that team—a club that knows something about ups and downs. In 2001 the unsung Bears

were the NFL's feel-good story, going 13–3 and winning the NFC Central. With expectations duly raised last year, Chicago promptly caved, devastated by injuries and an eight-game losing streak on its way to a 4–12 finish. Even with healthy starters, offensive coordinator John Shoop's run-oriented, short-passing sets had been

uninspiring, but last year, with 15 starting offensive lineups and a patchwork line, the attack was plodding and anemic. Chicago ranked 29th in the league in total

SLASHING Stewart loosens up the defense with his scrambling, and the Bears won't discourage him from running.

DAVID E. KLUTHO



UNDER THE GUN

► The Bears will no doubt miss linebacker Roosevelt Colvin, a free-agent departure whose superior pass-rush skills freed middle linebacker Brian Urlacher to make play after play. **BRYAN KNIGHT**, a second-year player from Pitt, takes over on the strong side. He's faster than Colvin, but his tackling is suspect.

offense (274.7 yards a game) and tied for 29th in average gain per play (4.5 yards), while brittle quarterbacks Jim Miller (released last February) and 37-year-old Chris Chandler (now Stewart's backup) struggled to stay upright. Enter the durable Stewart, signed to a two-year, \$5 million contract in the hope that he'll recapture his, and Chicago's, 2001 magic.

"When we brought him in, it was, 'You're the starter,'" Bears coach Dick Jauron says. "We've incorporated his running ability into our game plans, which will make him that much more dangerous. If he's not throwing the ball, he's coming out—but I don't mean out of the game. He's running." Says wideout Marty Booker, whose 97 catches and 1,189 receiving yards made him the team's only offensive standout last year, "I can't wait to see that first 30-yard scramble. It'll loosen everything up."

But Stewart can't carry the offense with his legs. The Bears need a return to form by third-year halfback Anthony Thomas, whose tale of two seasons is all too familiar: 1,183 rushing yards as the NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year in 2001, 721 yards in an injury-shortened '02. Pro Bowl center Olin Kreutz leads a line that at least remained healthy through camp, though right tackle Marc Colombo, sidelined since breaking his kneecap last Nov. 18, is out indefinitely.

Stewart looked shaky at times during training camp—particularly when making quick reads and taking shorter drops than he's accustomed to—but Shoop and Jauron are quick to laud their pupil's aptitude and enthusiasm. "He's playing in a QB-friendly system," says Jauron, who insists Stewart won't have to worry about giving way to Chandler or impressive rookie Rex Grossman, a first-round draft pick out of Florida. "Our progressions are simple, and he won't be doing things he's never done. I have no reason to doubt Kordell. He's our guy."

Stewart beams when told of Jauron's vote of confidence. If all he needed with the Steelers was similar support, he has no excuses now. "I can't explain how good it feels to be appreciated," he said after an August practice in which his every move brought ovations from Bears' faithful in attendance, a regular occurrence during camp. "I want validation. And I want it here."

—J.E.

ENEMY LINES

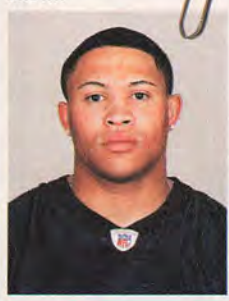
An opposing scout's view

Brian Urlacher can make an average player look much better. His pursuit is second to none. He's a notch below Ray Lewis, but only because Lewis is meaner. . . . The pressure's on **Mike Brown** in the secondary because the corners aren't that good. **R.W. McQuarters** is O.K., but **Jerry Azumah** shouldn't be a starting NFL corner. His natural instincts just aren't what they need to be. They'll miss Walt Harris very badly. . . . At quarterback they didn't have many choices other than **Kordell Stewart**. Chicago couldn't afford to wait until June and take a chance on Brian Griese,

"Urlacher can make an average player look much better. His pursuit is second to none."

and really, who else was there? Stewart is there to bridge the gap until **Rex Grossman** is ready. . . . It's hard to fault **Anthony Thomas** for his stats last year, because no back could've produced behind that decimated line. Stewart will soften things, and Thomas will benefit. . . . **Marty Booker** is the most underrated receiver in the league. **Desmond Clark** is a top-notch tight end, and Stewart will look for him often. Clark could have a breakout year. . . . They could finish second in the division or they could finish fourth. Six or seven wins would be impressive.

BROWN



SCHEDULE

Sept. 7	at San Francisco
14	at Minnesota
21	Open date
29	GREEN BAY (Mon.)
Oct. 5	OAKLAND
12	at New Orleans
19	at Seattle
26	DETROIT
Nov. 2	SAN DIEGO
9	at Detroit
16	ST. LOUIS
23	at Denver
30	ARIZONA
Dec. 7	at Green Bay
14	MINNESOTA
21	WASHINGTON
28	at Kansas City

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 23
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .480
Games against playoff teams: 4

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD 4-12

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 32/24/29
DEFENSE 26/24/25

COACH: Dick Jauron;
fifth season with Chicago
(28-36 in NFL)

ANTHONY THOMAS

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	73	214	721	3.4
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
24	163	6.8	6	

KORDELL STEWART

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	122	166	109	65.7
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
1,155	6	6	82.8	

DAIMON SHELTON

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	379	0	0	—
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
7	34	4.9	0	

MARTY BOOKER

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	48	97	1,189	6

DESMOND CLARK

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	233	2	42	0

MIKE GANDY

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 4"	304 lbs.	13	11

REX TUCKER

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 5"	315 lbs.	5	5

OLIN KREUTZ

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 2"	285 lbs.	15	15

CHRIS VILLARRIAL

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 4"	308 lbs.	15	15

AARON GIBSON

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 6"	390 lbs.	1	0

DEZ WHITE

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	175	51	656	4

DEFENSE

RE	ALEX BROWN	40 tackles	2½ sacks
RT	BRYAN ROBINSON	34 tackles	1 sack
LT	KEITH TRAYLOR	31 tackles	1 sack
LE	PHILLIP DANIELS	43 tackles	5½ sacks
OLB	BRYAN KNIGHT	12 tackles	1½ sacks
MLB	BRIAN URLACHER	152 tackles	4½ sacks
OLB	WARRICK HOLDMAN	20 tackles	0 sacks
CB	R.W. MCQUARTERS	43 tackles	1 int.
SS	MIKE GREEN	118 tackles	0 int.
FS	MIKE BROWN	84 tackles	3 int.
CB	JERRY AZUMAH	82 tackles	0 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS PVR

K	PAUL EDINGER	216	29/29 XPs	22/28 FGs	95 pts.
PR	BOBBY WADE (R)	403	16 ret.	14.0 avg.	0 TDs
KR	AHMAD MERRITT	406	45 ret.	22.9 avg.	0 TDs
P	BRAD MAYNARD		87 punts	42.3 avg.	

NFC
NORTH

4

DETROIT Lions

Moochmania is just the first positive step on the long road back for a struggling franchise

THEY BROKE out in loud cheers and applause at first sight of him and roared even more when he acknowledged them with a nod and a wave. The greeting that Lions fans gave new coach Steve Mariucci at an open practice last month was the kind usually reserved for, well, a savior. And though he detests the mere mention of that word, Mariucci can't deny that his hiring last February has been received in Detroit with religious fervor. At Ford Field on that day in early August, the players and the coaches were stunned to find that almost 28,000 fans had come to worship.

"I'd never seen anything like it," says defensive end Robert Porcher, who, in beginning his 12th season with the Lions, is an expert on such matters in Detroit. "When our bus got close to the stadium, and there was a lot of traffic, we were like, What's going on here?"

Moochmania, that's what. In a city that has suffered through an NFL-high 27 losses over the past two years, the arrival of Michigan native Mariucci—he was born and raised in Iron City—is like a godsend. In six years as coach of the 49ers he was 57–39 and went to the playoffs four times, but he was fired last Jan. 15 because of philosophical differences with the front office. Content to sit out the year (San Fran-

cisco owed him \$2.2 million for the last year of his contract), Mariucci had planned a May vacation to Italy's Amalfi Coast with his wife, Gayle, and their four kids. "Had the flights booked, had the hotels booked, it was going to be great," he says. "And then this happened." This was the firing of Marty Mornhinweg on Jan. 27, less than a

month after Lions president Matt Millen had announced that Mornhinweg would return for a third season. Of course, that was before Mariucci became available.

YARDSTICK Stewart averaged 4.4 yards a rush last year, but he needs more carries for the Lions to be successful.

DANNY MOLOSHOK/GETTY IMAGES



UNDER THE GUN

► The Lions overpaid for free-agent cornerback **DRE' BLY** (five years, \$25 million) but did it out of necessity. Last year Detroit ranked 30th in the league against the pass. With second-year man André Goodman holding down the other corner spot, the Lions are counting on Bly to bring stability to a vulnerable secondary.

Mornhinweg, who had been an offensive coordinator under Mariucci in San Francisco, was a horrible fit in Detroit and lost the team with his ham-handed attempts at motivation through intimidation. In Mariucci, Millen gets the man he wanted all along, even if it did cost him \$25 million over five years. "When Matt called, I told him that for me to come back, it'd have to be a special job," Mariucci says. "It was tough to leave [the Niners] the way I did, and I wasn't looking [for a job]. But the chance to come home was too much to pass up."

No-nonsense and ultraorganized, Mariucci has made an immediate impact on his players as well. "He has that credibility, having won all those years in San Francisco," says second-year quarterback Joey Harrington. "He demands focus, holds us all accountable. The guy sees everything on the field."

Unsure of himself as a rookie starter, Harrington seems far more relaxed this year and is helped by the similarities in his former and current coaches' West Coast sets. Though he was sacked only eight times in 12 starts last year, Harrington struggled with his progressions, often throwing the ball away before even looking for his third option. He had a paltry .501 completion percentage. "At this time last year my head was swimming," Harrington says. "There were times I had no idea what the play I was calling needed. It's hard to be accurate when you don't know where you're throwing. I feel better now, especially with the guys I have around me."

The passing offense, which ranked 25th in the league a year ago, is more threatening with the arrival of Michigan State wide-out Charles Rogers, the second pick in the draft. Though he suffered a dislocated left ring finger during camp, the 6' 2", 202-pound Rogers flashed the game-breaking speed that makes him Detroit's biggest offensive threat since Barry Sanders. The Lions are also hoping for another solid year from running back James Stewart, though they would love to get him more carries. Last season only the Rams ran the ball fewer times than Detroit did.

Even in a best-case scenario the Lions don't project as a playoff team this year. But in Mariucci they have someone to rally around. "This city's waited a long time," he says. "The fans are hungry. They deserve a winner."

"The players will give Mariucci the respect they didn't give Marty Mornhinweg."

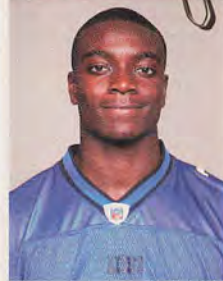
able this year, especially if **Charles Rogers** comes along. . . . **James Stewart** is a serviceable running back, but you can't ride him every week. That will make it tough because **Steve Mariucci** will want to run the ball more than the Lions have recently. Stewart's just not an upper-echelon back. . . . They have a nice little core on offense, and Mariucci will make them better this year. The players will give him the respect they didn't give Marty Mornhinweg. . . . But that defense scares no one, even in a weak division. They're probably two years away from contending.

ENEMY LINES

An opposing scout's view

They don't have a single guy on defense that you have to account for. **Earl Holmes** isn't the answer at linebacker; he's just average against the run. . . . [Rookie linebacker] **Boss Bailey** was a reach, even where they picked him [early in the second round]. He wasn't on a lot of teams' draft boards because his knees [two ACL tears in college] will shorten his career. . . . The defensive line is getting old fast. **Luther Elliss** is hanging on, and **Robert Porcher** may have lost a step. . . . Their safeties will be fine, but their corners won't be. . . . **Joey Harrington** will be more comfort-

ROGERS



SCHEDULE

Sept. 7	ARIZONA
14	at Green Bay
21	MINNESOTA
28	at Denver
Oct. 5	at San Francisco
12	Open date
19	DALLAS
26	at Chicago
Nov. 2	OAKLAND
9	CHICAGO
16	at Seattle
23	at Minnesota
27	GREEN BAY (Thurs.)
Dec. 7	SAN DIEGO
14	at Kansas City
21	at Carolina
28	ST. LOUIS

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 27
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .473
Games against playoff teams: 4

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD: 3-13

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 29/25/28

DEFENSE 17/30/31

COACH: Steve Mariucci,
first season with Detroit
(57-39 in NFL)

JAMES STEWART				
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	45	231	1,021	4.4
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
46	333	7.2	6	

JOEY HARRINGTON				
POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	82	429	215	50.1
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
2,294	12	16	59.9	

CORY SCHLESINGER				
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	249	49	139	2.8
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
35	263	7.5	2	

CHARLES ROGERS (R)				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	58	68	1,351	13

MIKHAEL RICKS				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	202	27	339	3

JEFF BACKUS				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 5"	309 lbs.	16	16

ERIC BEVERLY				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 3"	300 lbs.	15	3

DOMINIC RAIOLA				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 1"	295 lbs.	16	16

RAY BROWN				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 5"	318 lbs.	16	16

STOCKAR MCDUGGLE				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 6"	367 lbs.	12	11

BILL SCHROEDER				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	180	36	595	5

DEFENSE

RE	JAMES HALL	49 tackles	2 sacks
RT	SHAUN ROGERS	48 tackles	2½ sacks
LT	DAN WILKINSON	16 tackles	0 sacks
LE	ROBERT PORCHER	45 tackles	5½ sacks
OLB	BRIAN WILLIAMS	11 tackles	0 sacks
MLB	EARL HOLMES	128 tackles	0 sacks
OLB	BARRETT GREEN	73 tackles	1 sack
CB	DRE' BLY	64 tackles	2 int.
SS	COREY HARRIS	79 tackles	2½ sacks
FS	BRIAN WALKER	44 tackles	0 int.
CB	ANDRÉ GOODMAN	42 tackles	1 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS PVR

K	JASON HANSON	232	31/31 XPs	23/28 FGs	100 pts.
PR	EDDIE DRUMMOND	329	18 ret.	7.7 avg.	1 TD
KR	EDDIE DRUMMOND	329	40 ret.	26.0 avg.	0 TDs
P	JOHN JETT		91 punts	42.2 avg.	

New acquisition (R) Rookie (statistics for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 89)

NFC
SOUTH

1

TAMPA BAY

Bucs

Uncertainty at running back won't be enough to derail a return trip to the Super Bowl

JON GRUDEN has never had a problem exuding confidence. It's in his determined walk and chilling gaze, which can unnerve even the most hardened opponent. More than anything, it's in his smirk. When the Tampa Bay coach curls and purses his lips, he's telling the world he has everything covered. Gruden smirks often when asked about his running game.

But why is this man smiling? While the Bucs have nearly everything else in place from last year's Super Bowl championship team—including nine starters returning to the NFL's top-ranked defense—they have no clear idea who will be carrying the ball. Gruden's top choice is Michael Pittman, who led the Bucs in rushing (718 yards) last season and gained 124 yards in the Super Bowl. Pittman, however, was charged with two counts of aggravated assault following an altercation with his wife, Melissa, in Phoenix on May 31; each count carries a penalty ranging from five to 15 years in prison. A pretrial hearing is scheduled for Sept. 3. If convicted, Pittman would be in violation of the probation he's serving for misdemeanor charges of criminal trespassing and criminal damage after arguing with Melissa in 2001, for which the league suspended him for one game. He could be sentenced to as much as six

months in jail for violating probation.

"We're obviously hoping that Mike will be available, but we do have other options," says Gruden, whose offense ranked 27th in rushing (97.3 yards per game) last season. "We have Thomas Jones. We have Aaron Stecker. We have Mike Alstott. Those are all good backs. But it's not just

the backs who will help us run the ball. It's the line, the tight ends, the decision-making by the quarterbacks and my play-calling. All those factors play a role."

COMING THROUGH The Bucs aren't sure who'll make the bulk of their carries, but Jones will get more than a few.

HEINZ KLUTMEIER



UNDER THE GUN

► **JOHN WADE** takes over at center for Jeff Christy, who, though released because he was past his prime, was smart and excelled at making line calls. The 6' 5" Wade will have to mesh quickly with a unit that struggled to jell early last season. Although he has the toughness and strength, Wade's quickness and mobility leave much to be desired.

Pittman, who isn't speaking publicly, is the player who impressed Gruden most early in camp, particularly with his conditioning. If he's not available, the Bucs would be forced to lean on the same backfield-by-committee approach that brought Gruden success in Oakland. The top threat in that scenario would be Jones. Tampa Bay traded for the fourth-year veteran shortly after Pittman's arrest, thinking the former first-round bust of the Cardinals might benefit from playing in a winning atmosphere. Jones is a shifty runner and a polished receiver who needs to stay healthy. (Last year he missed one game with a hairline fracture in his left ankle and six games with a broken left hand, but still

gained a career-high 511 yards.) Stecker, one of the Bucs' top special teams players, has vision, patience and good hands, making him valuable as a third-down back. Alstott is the banger who will carry primarily on goal line and short-yardage situations.

"Gruden will find a way to make it work," says Bucs quarterback Brad Johnson. "He knows how to utilize each person to the best of their abilities. Even with Michael available, there won't be one featured guy. The only question is how to get everybody enough touches."

Tampa Bay has all its key offensive play-makers back from a unit that averaged 26.4 points in its last seven games. Johnson led the NFC with a 92.9 passer rating. He still has big targets like Keyshawn Johnson, Keenan McCardell and Joe Jurevicius. And the line, the unit that struggled with chemistry issues and ineffectiveness early in 2002, has stabilized. "We had a lot of new faces up front last year, but now we know each other," says tackle Roman Oben. "And we know what to expect."

That—and, of course, the defense, which led the league last season in fewest points allowed (12.3 per game)—will be essential to Tampa Bay's hopes of repeating this season. By the way, Gruden doesn't even use the word *repeat*. "We talk about winning a championship, not defending one," he says. "Let's talk about what we know, and we know how to win a title."

That said, the Bucs know that a healthy running game was an important factor in their march to the title. If the running game isn't in place, Gruden will have to work overtime to keep the smirks off the faces of Tampa Bay's opponents. —Jeffri Chadiha

ENEMY LINES

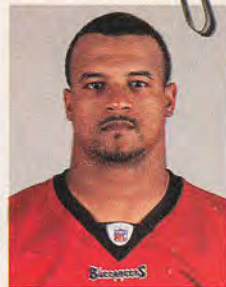
An opposing scout's view

They lost Al Singleton [at linebacker] and picked up **Dwayne Rudd**, which I think hurts them. Rudd's not as aggressive or instinctive as Singleton. Plus he's a natural weakside linebacker who's moving to the strong side. Putting him with **Derrick Brooks** and **Shelton Quarles** gives them three weakside linebackers playing alongside one another. Those guys can all run, but I think Rudd will be a weak link. . . . Switching **Dwight Smith** from nickelback to free safety is a great move. He has range, and he'll hit you. I see only two problems: When you move to a thinking position and have to

"Johnson doesn't have a great arm, but he's good at throwing those short crossing routes."

call defenses, it can hinder your aggressiveness, and it leaves a hole at nickelback. When Smith was there they could put him on an island and he'd cover everybody. He also allowed [defensive coordinator] **Monte Kiffin** to send **Ronde Barber** on blitzes. . . . On offense **Brad Johnson** is their most valuable player. He doesn't have a great arm, but he's good at throwing those short crossing routes. . . . They can repeat, but it will be harder to win it all this year. They have a tougher schedule, and everybody is going to be gunning for them. The key is, Are they still hungry?

SMITH



SCHEDULE

Sept. 8	at Philadelphia (Mon.)
14	CAROLINA
21	at Atlanta
28	Open date
Oct. 6	INDIANAPOLIS (Mon.)
12	at Washington
19	at San Francisco
26	DALLAS
Nov. 2	NEW ORLEANS
9	at Carolina
16	GREEN BAY
24	N.Y. GIANTS (Mon.)
30	at Jacksonville
Dec. 7	at New Orleans
14	HOUSTON
20	ATLANTA (Sat.)
28	at Tennessee

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 4
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .539
Games against playoff teams: 8

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD: 12-4

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 27/15/24
DEFENSE T5/I/I

COACH: Jon Gruden:
second season with
Tampa Bay (50-30 in NFL)

MICHAEL PITTMAN

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	88	204	718	3.5
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
59	477	8.1	1	

BRAD JOHNSON

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	31	451	281	62.3
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
3,049	22	6	92.9	

MIKE ALSTOTT

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	97	146	548	3.8
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
35	242	6.9	7	

KEYSHAWN JOHNSON

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	83	76	1,088	5

KEN DILGER

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	204	34	329	2

ROMAN OBEN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 4"	305 lbs.	16	16

KERRY JENKINS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 5"	305 lbs.	15	15

JOHN WADE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 5"	299 lbs.	16	16

JASON WHITTLE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 4"	305 lbs.	14	14

KENYATTA WALKER

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 5"	302 lbs.	13	13

KEENAN MCCARDELL

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	114	61	670	6

DEFENSE

RE	SIMEON RICE	50 tackles	15½ sacks
RT	WARREN SAPP	47 tackles	7½ sacks
LT	ANTHONY MCFARLAND	20 tackles	1½ sacks
LE	GREG SPIRES	37 tackles	3½ sacks
OLB	DWAYNE RUDD	62 tackles	1 sack
MLB	SHELTON QUARLES	113 tackles	1 sack
OLB	DERRICK BROOKS	118 tackles	5 int.
CB	RONDE BARBER	75 tackles	2 int.
SS	JOHN LYNCH	64 tackles	3 int.
FS	DWIGHT SMITH	26 tackles	4 int.
CB	BRIAN KELLY	66 tackles	8 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS PVR

K	MARTIN GRAMATICA	136	32/32 XPs	32/39 FGs	128 pts.
PR	KARL WILLIAMS	286	43 ret.	9.5 avg.	1TD
KR	AARON STECKER	319	37 ret.	25.2 avg.	0TDs
P	TOM TUPA		90 punts	42.8 avg.	

ATLANTA
Falcons

With the franchise quarterback hurt, the Keith Brooking-led defense must carry the load

THE STEAK dinner was exceptional, and the view, overlooking intricate landscaping in the backyard, wasn't bad either. All-Pro linebacker Keith Brooking had been invited to the home of Falcons owner Arthur Blank, and it was time to get to the point of this mid-February visit. Brooking's contract with Atlanta had expired, the unrestricted free-agent signing period was fast approaching, and the five-year veteran wanted to have a man-to-man talk with Blank. No agents. No salary-cap gurus. Just the two of them.

Brooking, generally regarded as one of the best players in the league at his position, was looking to deliver a simple and heartfelt message to Blank: All he wanted was a fair deal and the chance to finish his career in Atlanta. He had grown up in the area, starred at Georgia Tech and been the first-round pick of the Falcons in the 1998 draft. "Atlanta is in my heart," he says. "This is where I've always wanted to be."

A few days later the Falcons signed Brooking to a seven-year, \$41 million contract that included a \$10.5 million bonus—the third-richest deal for a linebacker in the NFL. Some six months later it looks like the smartest move the team made in the off-season. With quarterback Michael Vick sidelined for at least four games with

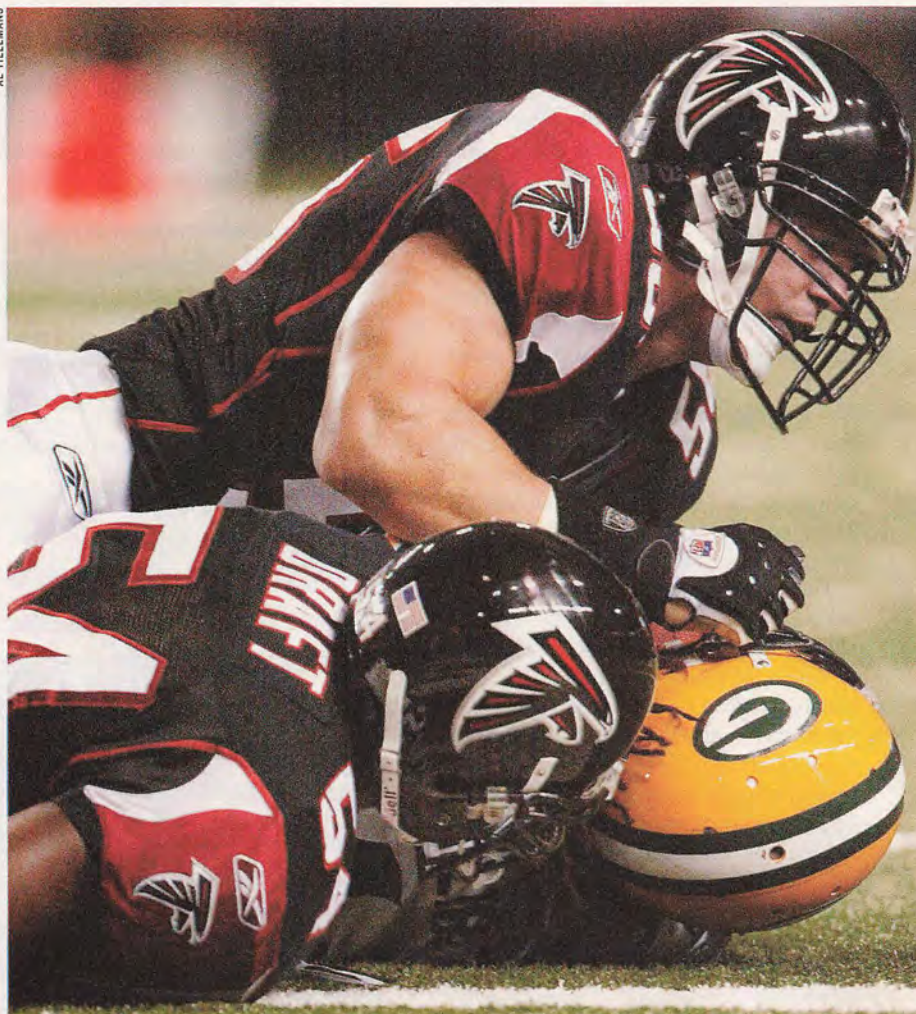
a fractured right fibula, the Falcons need the defense to carry a bigger share of the load until their offensive catalyst returns.

More specifically, the team needs Brooking to set the tone. Often referred to as a throwback for his aggressive, no-nonsense approach, his fiery temperament is in evidence even in practice. (At Georgia Tech he got kicked out of practice after hitting

quarterback Joe Hamilton.) At 6' 2" and 245 pounds Brooking has the speed to run down ballcarriers all over the field, the instincts to blitz effectively and the quickness to shadow backs and tight ends in pass cov-

BIRDS OF PREY Brooking (below, top) makes plays from sideline to sideline, and Draft is coming off his best year as a pro.

AL TELEMANS

**UNDER THE GUN**

► Last year, in his only start of the season, backup quarterback **DOUG JOHNSON** stepped in for an injured Michael Vick and led the Falcons to an upset of the Giants. Now, with Vick out (broken leg) for at least the first month of the season, the fortunes of a Super Bowl contender could be riding on the right arm of the fourth-year passer.

erage. "Keith doesn't just make a lot of tackles," says fellow linebacker Chris Draft. "He makes plays when they count."

"People don't understand the subtle ways he helps our defense," says defensive coordinator Wade Phillips. "We were fourth in the league in sacks last year. When we blitzed, we never had to worry about leaving Keith in single coverage, because he can cover just about anybody."

After playing middle linebacker in a 4-3 set in his first three years in the pros, Brooking made a seamless transition to Phillips's 3-4 in 2001, leading the Falcons with 127 tackles from his inside position. His teammates, however, were slower to make the adjustment. In training camp last year Phillips simplified his schemes, running only a handful of fronts and coverages until the players became more comfortable with his system. Though the Falcons ranked only 19th in total defense, they finished second in the league in takeaways (39) and were eighth in points allowed. In their two playoff games they held the Packers and the Eagles to seven and 13 points, respectively. "At the end of last season," Brooking says, "I don't think anybody was playing better than our defense was, except for Tampa Bay."

The strength of the defense remains concentrated in the front seven. Ends Patrick Kerney and Brady Smith are hard-driving pass rushers, and the 5'11", 232-pound Draft had the best season of his four-year career. The secondary is questionable, with a pair of free-agent pickups—former Packers cornerback Tyrone Williams and former Bengals safety Cory Hall—now in the mix. Most important, 11-year veteran corner Ray Buchanan has to rebound from a miserable 2002, during which he missed four games for violating the league's policy on steroids and related substances.

Even before Vick was injured, the defense believed it had to do more. "We want to take the pressure off Mike because he might not have that magical season everyone is expecting," Buchanan said in July. "The key is to shut down teams and give [the offense] good field position because we don't want to put him in situations where he has to win the game by himself."

"We're only going to get better," Brooking vows. One high-profile player is down, but another is ready to take charge. —J.C.

ENEMY LINES

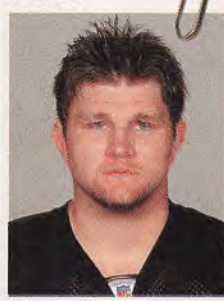
An opposing scout's view

Peerless Price will be a good addition at wideout, and **Brian Finneran** is underrated. He has excellent height [6' 5"] and uses his body to shield defenders from the ball. . . . **Alge Crumpler** should have a big year. He's a tough runner after the catch, and he can really stretch the field. He can create matchup problems with his athleticism. . . . Their running game is solid. **T.J. Duckett** is a load when he gets going, but the key to their backfield is **Warrick Dunn**. He's elusive in the open field, and he's a tougher inside runner than people give him credit for. . . . Their best line-

"Duckett is a load when he gets going, but the key to their backfield is Warrick Dunn."

man is probably **Travis Claridge**, who's not very nimble but has a strong base and is a surly run-blocker. . . . **Dan Reeves** has his critics, but he knows how to attack a defense. He tailors his system to take advantage of his opponent's weaknesses. . . . **Patrick Kerney** runs well, has a great motor and understands how to use his hands. **Keith Brooking** can really run for a big middle linebacker, and **Chris Draft** plays smart, and he's tough. . . . **Ray Buchanan** is a liability. He can't run, and now he's got a reputation as a guy who won't tackle.

CLARIDGE



SCHEDULE

Sept. 7	at Dallas
14	WASHINGTON
21	TAMPA BAY
28	at Carolina
Oct. 5	MINNESOTA
13	at St. Louis (Mon.)
19	NEW ORLEANS
26	Open date
Nov. 2	PHILADELPHIA
9	at N.Y. Giants
16	at New Orleans
23	TENNESSEE
30	at Houston
Dec. 7	CAROLINA
14	at Indianapolis
20	at Tampa Bay (Sat.)
28	JACKSONVILLE

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 11
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .523
Games against playoff teams: 6

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD: 9-6-1

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 4/23/14
DEFENSE 23/16/19

COACH: Dan Reeves; seventh season with Atlanta (187-155-2 in NFL)

WARRICK DUNN				
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	68	230	927	4.0
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
50	377	7.5	9	

DOUG JOHNSON				
POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	159	57	37	64.9
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
448	2	3	78.7	

JUSTIN GRIFFITH (R)				
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	267	91	471	5.2
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
19	199	10.5	2	

PEERLESS PRICE				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	42	94	1,252	9

ALGE CRUMPLER				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	171	36	455	5

BOB WHITFIELD				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	QMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 5"	310 lbs.	16	16

TRAVIS CLARIDGE				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	QMS.	STARTS
LQ	6' 5"	300 lbs.	16	16

TODD MCCLURE				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	QMS.	STARTS
C	6' 1"	286 lbs.	16	16

KYNAN FORNEY				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	QMS.	STARTS
RQ	6' 2"	305 lbs.	14	12

TODD WEINER				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	QMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 4"	297 lbs.	16	15

BRIAN FINNERAN				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	128	56	838	6

DEFENSE

RE	BRADY SMITH	39 tackles	6½ sacks
NT	ELLIS JOHNSON	27 tackles	7 sacks
LE	PATRICK KERNEY	58 tackles	10½ sacks
OLB	MATT STEWART	53 tackles	3 sacks
ILB	CHRIS DRAFT	64 tackles	3½ sacks
ILB	KEITH BROOKING	140 tackles	2 int.
OLB	SAM ROGERS	41 tackles	6½ sacks
CB	TYRONE WILLIAMS	69 tackles	1 int.
SS	CORY HALL	58 tackles	1 int.
FS	KEION CARPENTER	49 tackles	4 int.
CB	RAY BUCHANAN	47 tackles	2 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS PVR

K	JAY FEELY	124	42/43 XPs	32/40 FGs	138 pts.
PR	ALLEN ROSSUM	431	24 ret.	12.0 avg.	0 TDs
KR	ALLEN ROSSUM	431	53 ret.	22.0 avg.	1 TD
P	CHRIS MOHR		67 punts	41.9 avg.	

NFC
SOUTH

3

NEW ORLEANS

Saints

Has the defense improved enough to keep this team from stumbling down the stretch (again)?

FREE SAFETY Tebucky Jones became fond of the Big Easy long before he arrived in a trade with the Patriots in April. His attachment to the city began in 1996, his junior year at Syracuse, when the Orangemen traveled to New Orleans and whipped Tulane. In '98, his rookie season with New England, the Patriots defeated the Saints in the Superdome. Then came Super Bowl XXXVI, in which the Pats shocked the Rams and won their first world championship—in New Orleans. So when Jones talks about his new hometown, he says, "I didn't come here to start losing."

It's that attitude that has the Saints excited about the sixth-year veteran. He has a touch of cockiness, but not enough to rub people the wrong way. He also has exceptional size for a safety (6' 2", 218 pounds), decent speed and the smarts that come from handling the complex schemes of New England coach Bill Belichick. In short, Jones is the type of player New Orleans had to have. The Saints gave up 20 or more points in all but one game last season, primarily because the defense lacked the speed to handle three- and four-receiver formations and mobile quarterbacks.

Jones, a punishing tackler, was setting the tone for the secondary in the first few

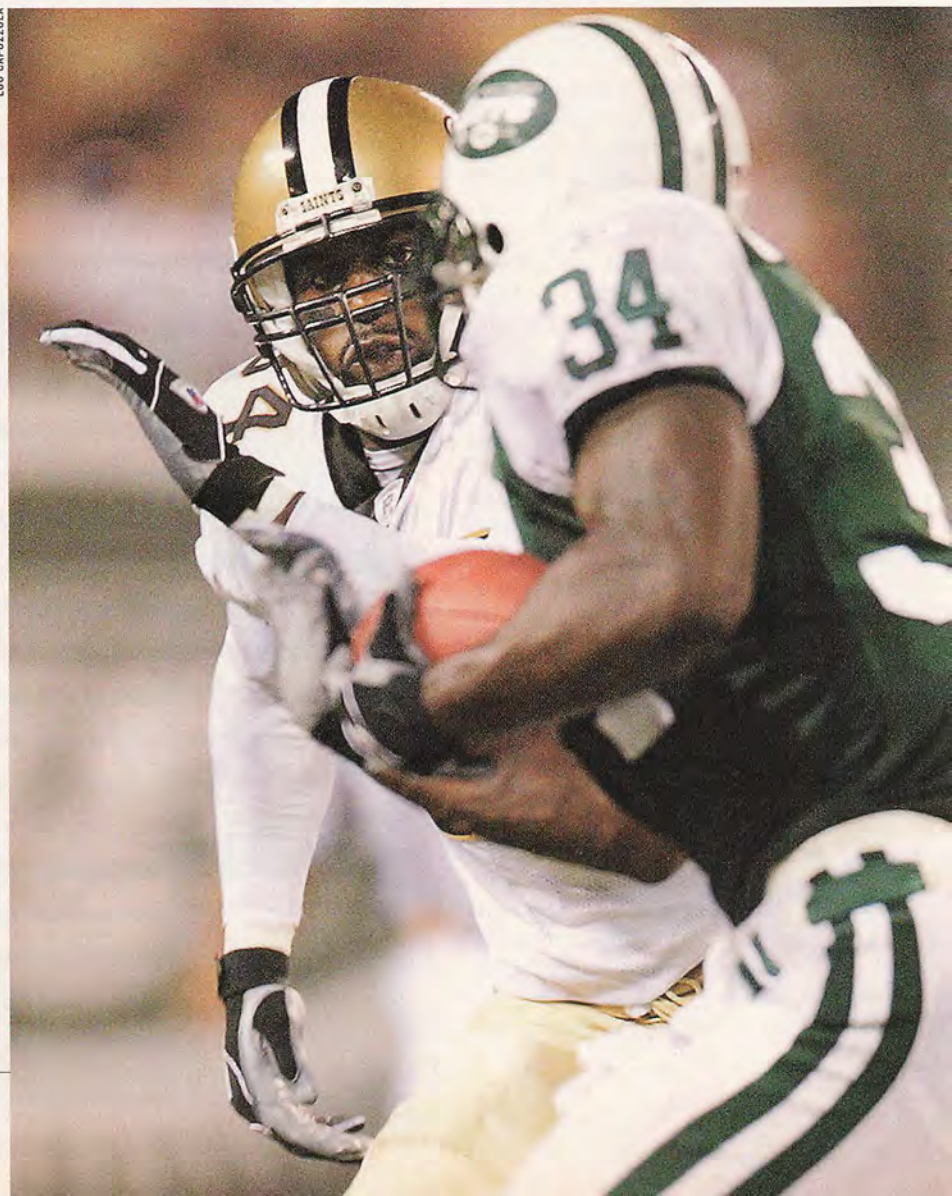
weeks of training camp. "He's shown his leadership by the way he directs people," says defensive coordinator Rick Venturi. "That's exactly what I want. I don't believe that people lead by talking in the locker room. Tebucky's a director, not a philosopher."

The Saints traded third- and seventh-

round picks in this year's draft, along with a fourth-rounder in 2004, to acquire Jones. They also added outside linebacker Derrick Rodgers in a trade with the Dolphins,

STALK MARKET The needy Saints have invested in ex-Patriot Jones, a supersized safety with speed and smarts.

LOU CAPOZZOLA



UNDER THE GUN

► The Saints were thinking more about chemistry than ability when they traded volatile left tackle Kyle Turley to the Rams and signed free agent **WAYNE GANDY** to replace him. Turley is more athletic, but New Orleans grew tired of his antics. If Gandy becomes the leader the Saints expect, he'll more than make up for what he lacks in athleticism.

signed free-agent cornerback Ashley Ambrose and moved up from 17th to sixth in the draft to select defensive tackle Johnathan Sullivan out of Georgia. The defense will open the season with at least four new starters, and as many as seven newcomers may see significant playing time. "Our biggest concern was finding a way to deal with all the mobile quarterbacks we face this season," says coach Jim Haslett. "We play Steve McNair, Donovan McNabb, Kordell Stewart and Michael Vick. We had a hard time last year dealing with quarterback scrambles, screen plays and spread offenses. Hopefully that won't happen again."

Jones is convinced it won't. "We're there speedwise," he says. "If a player catches the ball in the middle of the field in practice, we have six or seven guys flying to him."

Talent alone won't be enough. The Saints also need staying power. In 2001 they combust in the midst of a playoff run and lost their final four games. Last season they were 9-4 and then finished with losses to the Vikings, the Bengals and the Panthers. "It's gotten so bad that when I brag to my friends about how good we are, they tell me we're only good early in the year," says cornerback Fred Thomas. That was especially true last season, when execution, not effort, ruined the Saints. "The bottom line is, we didn't play well on either side of the ball to get into the playoffs," says middle linebacker Darrin Smith. "I'm sure there will be a lot of emphasis on that toward the end of this year. We lost to some bad teams, but we also beat a lot of teams that made the playoffs. We beat the Super Bowl champion [Tampa Bay] twice."

The Saints' defensive players are eager to create the same type of chemistry that propelled the Bucs to a title. They often gathered in the off-season to watch film and organized barbecues after workouts. Jones missed those functions—he was moving his family to New Orleans—but he believes that time together like that is invaluable. "If we're going to be successful, we need to believe in each other when we line up," he says. "We have to know people will make mistakes, and we have to play through them. We can't let little things grind us up inside. I tell these guys all the time that we have far too much talent. There's no way we shouldn't be playing in the Super Bowl."

"If Brooks can be more consistent, they will be as dangerous as any team in the league."

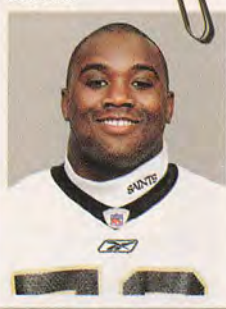
They've really added some speed to their defense. They saw Tampa Bay winning with a fast defense, and now they're trying to do the same. . . . **Johnathan Sullivan** has a lot of potential. He's quick for a big guy, and he's solid against the run. . . . I really like **Darren Howard**. He's big, strong, fast and when he comes to play, he's a complete defensive end. . . . Even though **Ashley Ambrose** is on the downside of his career, he wasn't a bad signing. They'll have a decent tandem if **Dale Carter** has his head on straight, because Carter is as talented as any corner in the league.

ENEMY LINES

An opposing scout's view

Aaron Brooks is one of those guys who runs hot and cold. I think inexperience is his biggest problem; he's still learning how to play under high expectations. . . . If Brooks can be more consistent, the Saints will be as dangerous as any team in the league. They have three speed receivers—**Joe Horn**, **Donte' Stallworth** and **Jerome Pathon**—who will scare anybody. Plus they've got Deuce McAllister in the backfield, and he can beat you with speed and power. . . . I think they'll miss Kyle Turley at left tackle, but they still have some talent on their line. **LeCharles Bentley** is a horse inside. . . .

BENTLEY



SCHEDULE

Sept. 7	at Seattle
14	HOUSTON
21	at Tennessee
28	INDIANAPOLIS
Oct. 5	at Carolina
12	CHICAGO
19	at Atlanta
26	CAROLINA
Nov. 2	at Tampa Bay
9	Open date
16	ATLANTA
23	at Philadelphia
30	at Washington
Dec. 7	TAMPA BAY
14	N.Y. GIANTS
21	at Jacksonville
28	DALLAS

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 13
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .520
Games against playoff teams: 8

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics



2002 RECORD: 9-7

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 17/16/19
DEFENSE 19/27/27

COACH: Jim Haslett; fourth season with New Orleans (26-22 in NFL)

DEUCE McALLISTER

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	8	325	1,388	4.3
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
47	352	7.5	3	

AARON BROOKS

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
QB	32	528	283	53.6
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
3,572	27	15	80.1	

TERRELLE SMITH

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	305	5	11	2.2
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
9	30	3.3	0	

JOE HORN

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	44	88	1,312	7

ERNE CONWELL

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	194	34	419	2

WAYNE GANDY

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 4"	308 lbs.	16	16

KENDYL JACOX

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 2"	330 lbs.	16	16

JERRY FONTENOT

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 3"	300 lbs.	16	16

LeCHARLES BENTLEY

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 2"	299 lbs.	14	14

SPENCER FOLAU

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 5"	315 lbs.	16	16

JEROME PATHON

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	132	43	523	4

DEFENSE

RE	DARREN HOWARD	48 tackles	8 sacks
RT	GRADY JACKSON	43 tackles	5½ sacks
LT	JOHNATHAN SULLIVAN (R)	74 tackles	4 sacks
LE	CHARLES GRANT	37 tackles	7 sacks
OLB	SEDRICK HODGE	75 tackles	0 sacks
MLB	DARRIN SMITH	96 tackles	3½ sacks
OLB	DERRICK RODGERS	74 tackles	2 int.
CB	ASHLEY AMBROSE	44 tackles	3 int.
SS	MEL MITCHELL	0 tackles	0 int.
FS	TEBUCKY JONES	50 tackles	1 int.
CB	DALE CARTER	30 tackles	1 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS PVR

K	JOHN CARNEY	176	37/37 XPs	31/35 FGs	130 pts.
PR	MICHAEL LEWIS	270	44 ret.	142 avg.	1 TDs
KR	MICHAEL LEWIS	270	70 ret.	25.8 avg.	2 TDs
P	MITCH BERGER	72	punts	41.9 avg.	

NFC
SOUTH

4

CAROLINA

Panthers

Stephen Davis is back home in Carolina and eager to carry his share of the load again

ONE WEEK of training camp was all Stephen Davis needed to see the benefits of signing as a free-agent running back with the Panthers. Every time he looked into the crowds at Wofford College in Spartanburg, S.C., he saw his wife, Dee Dee, and their four children, who had rarely watched him practice during the seven seasons he spent with the Redskins. Hardly a day went by that he didn't bump into somebody who knew him. One morning when he trotted out of the locker room with quarterback Rodney Peete, Davis pointed to a small stadium at the end of a narrow street. That's where he played football for Spartanburg High.

That's what happens when you come home. Everything feels warmer and a bit more secure. And it's a good bet that Davis will be feeling plenty comfortable when the regular season begins. Ericsson Stadium in Charlotte is a mere hour and a half drive from the dream house he built in Columbia, S.C., two years ago. More important, Davis is returning to the role he enjoyed in Washington before Steve Spurrier brought his pass-happy Fun 'n' Gun offense to the Redskins last season.

Although Davis has been selected to two Pro Bowls and clearly was Washington's top offensive weapon in 2001,

Spurrier had little use for him. Davis, a 6-foot, 230-pound workhorse who prefers 20 or more carries a game, averaged 17.25 an outing in '02 and gained only 820 yards. (He missed four of Washington's last nine games with a sprained right knee.) "I tell everybody that things happen for a reason," Davis says. "It was hard

to deal with everything last year—not getting carries, getting ignored, dealing with a coach who didn't like my running style. But I grew from it. I plan on taking

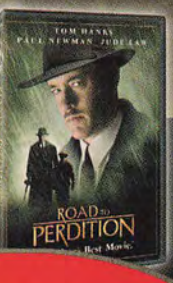
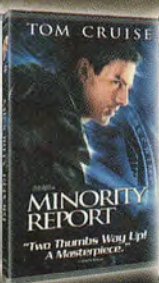
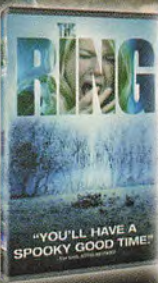
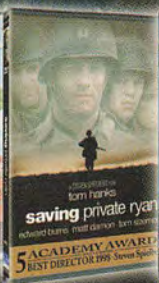
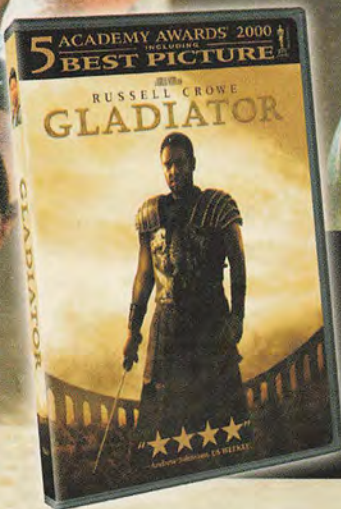
BUSTIN' LOOSE Davis hopes he can jump-start an offense that ranked 25th in the league in rushing last season.



UNDER THE GUN

► Wideout **MUHSIN MUHAMMAD** has been to a Pro Bowl and is the Panthers' most polished receiver. (His 431 career receptions for 5,509 yards are team records.) But injuries have haunted him—sprained left shoulder and turf toe in 2001; pulled hamstring in 2002—as has inconsistency. On a team searching for playmakers, he needs to prove he can still be one.

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advantage of every chance I get here."

Davis won't have to worry about opportunities. The Panthers had the NFL's second-worst offense (267.5 yards a game) and ranked 25th in the league in rushing yards (99.1 per game) last season, and coach John Fox plans to rely heavily on Davis this year. Before taking over Carolina in January 2002, Fox spent five years as the Giants' defensive coordinator, so he knows from firsthand experience in the NFL East what Davis is capable of doing. "Stephen has that athletic arrogance that all great players have, and we need some of that in our offense," Fox says. "We knew his lack of production in Washington didn't result from a decline in his skills. It came from not playing or running as much. But he's our kind of back. There may be faster runners, but there aren't many who are as productive [in terms of carries]."

While Davis was the critical ingredient Carolina added to its offense, he wasn't the only pickup. Two free agents, guard Doug Brzezinski (Eagles) and wide receiver Ricky Proehl (Rams), should make immediate contributions, and first-round pick Jordan Gross will start at right tackle.

Fox says he's not planning to have a "three-yards-and-a-cloud-of-dust offense," but he does want an efficient, effective unit. Carolina fielded the league's second-best defense in 2002 and, with a little help from the offense, might have finished better than 7-9. Three of the losses were by three points or fewer. "We had three games where we didn't even score in double digits," says left tackle Todd Steussie. "That's inexcusable. We know we're still not going to light up the scoreboard this year, but if we can win the time-of-possession battle, our defense can play fresh and fast. We definitely need to hold up our end of the bargain."

Davis agrees. If all goes according to plan, he should finish the year with around 350 carries. The thought brings a sly smile to his face. Everything is familiar again—his surroundings, his job description—and Davis thinks great things lie ahead for his team. "I've played eight years, and I know that running backs don't have long careers in this league," he says. "I wanted to be with a team that has a shot at making the playoffs and doing something when they get there. That's what we have here."

"Peppers is scary because he's just learning how to play. He has great speed and footwork."

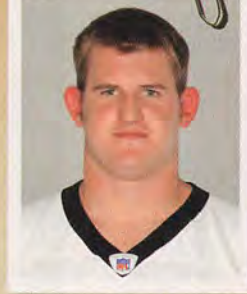
be ready, though. He's going to see a lot more creative blocking schemes now that people have had a chance to watch him for a year. . . . Nobody talks about Jenkins, but he has everything you want in a defensive tackle. He's athletic as hell, and he can play the run and the pass. . . . They don't have great corners [Terry Cousin and Reggie Howard], so they put those guys in position to play conservative. . . . Jordan Gross will be a player. He's pretty nimble for a guy with great size. . . . Rodney Peete won't beat you with his arm, but he'll make smart decisions.

ENEMY LINES

An opposing scout's view

cc Losing Jack Del Rio as their defensive coordinator will hurt, but they have five guys on their defense—Julius Peppers, Kris Jenkins, Dan Morgan, Will Witherspoon and Mike Minter—who are as good as any young players you'll find at their positions. Those are the kind of guys you can build around. . . . Peppers is scary because he's just learning how to play this game. He's got great speed and footwork, and he probably has a chip on his shoulder after that suspension [four games after testing positive for a banned substance] cost him a Pro Bowl berth. He'd better

GROSS



SCHEDULE

Sept. 7	JACKSONVILLE
14	at Tampa Bay
21	Open date
28	ATLANTA
Oct. 5	NEW ORLEANS
12	at Indianapolis
19	TENNESSEE
26	at New Orleans
Nov. 2	at Houston
9	TAMPA BAY
16	WASHINGTON
23	at Dallas
30	PHILADELPHIA
Dec. 7	at Atlanta
14	at Arizona
21	DETROIT
28	at N.Y. Giants

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 10
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .523
Games against playoff teams: 8

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD: 7-9

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 25/30/31
DEFENSE 8/4/2

COACH: John Fox; second season with Carolina (7-9 in NFL)

STEPHEN DAVIS					
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.	
RB	13	207	820	4.0	
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs		
23	142	6.2	8		

RODNEY PEETE					
POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%	
QB	95	381	223	58.5	
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING		
2,630	15	14	77.4		

BRAD HOOVER					
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.	
FB	344	31	129	4.2	
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs		
17	187	11.0	2		

MUHSIN MUHAMMAD					
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs	
WR	154	63	823	3	

KRIS MANGUM					
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs	
TE	256	16	159	0	

TODD STEUSSIE					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
LT	6' 6"	308 lbs.	16	16	

JENO JAMES					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
LG	6' 3"	310 lbs.	9	2	

JEFF MITCHELL					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
C	6' 4"	300 lbs.	16	16	

KEVIN DONNALLEY					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
RG	6' 5"	310 lbs.	16	16	

JORDAN GROSS (R)					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
RT	6' 4"	300 lbs.	11	11	

STEVE SMITH					
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs	
WR	121	54	872	3	

DEFENSE

RE	JULIUS PEPPERS	36 tackles	12 sacks
RT	BRENTSON BUCKNER	32 tackles	5 sacks
LT	KRIS JENKINS	44 tackles	7 sacks
LE	MIKE RUCKER	68 tackles	10 sacks
OLB	WILL WITHERSPOON	63 tackles	1½ sacks
MLB	DAN MORGAN	54 tackles	1 sack
OLB	GREG FAVORS	0 tackles	0 sacks
CB	REGGIE HOWARD	84 tackles	2 int.
SS	MIKE MINTER	82 tackles	4 int.
FS	DEON GRANT	68 tackles	3 int.
CB	TERRY COUSIN	59 tackles	2 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS PVR

K	JOHN KASAY	248	5/5 XPs	2/5 FGs	11 pts.
PR	STEVE SMITH	121	55 ret.	8.5 avg.	2 TDs
KR	STEVE SMITH	121	26 ret.	22.0 avg.	0 TDs
P	TODD SAUERBRUN	104	punts	45.5 avg.	

NFC
EAST

1

PHILADELPHIA Eagles

The league's most consistent winner puts its running game in the hands of a first-year starter

DO YOU know why the Eagles have played 45 consecutive regular-season games without back-to-back losses? (No other team comes close to that run; Tampa Bay is second with 27 straight.)

Sure, Philadelphia has been shutting down opponents for the last three seasons, finishing among the top 10 in the NFL in team defense each year. Yes, quarterback Donovan McNabb, though streaky, has emerged as the offensive cornerstone coach Andy Reid thought he was getting when he made McNabb the No. 2 pick in the 1999 draft. But the secret to the Eagles' consistently strong performance—they are the winningest NFL team since the start of the 2000 campaign—is the running game. Philly averaged 4.5 yards per carry over the last three years.

That translates into ball control. The Eagles had a 2:20 edge in time of possession per game in 2002, 11th best in the NFL, even with McNabb missing six games with a broken ankle. And after backup Koy Detmer was hurt in his first start for McNabb, third-stringer A.J. Feeley had to take over the next five games. Though Reid may be known as a West Coast, pass-happy coach, remember that he was an offensive line assis-

tant for 14 years and likes to pound it.

That brings us to this dicey question: Is third-year back Correll Buckhalter, who hasn't been an every-down player since his senior year in high school, the man to keep the Philadelphia rushing attack in gear?

Because of a 26-day holdout by incumbent running back Duce Staley, who

has one year, at \$2.2 million, remaining on his contract and didn't report until Sunday, Buckhalter had a clear shot at becoming the starter in training camp.

CLEAR SAILING With his knee repaired and Staley late to camp, Buckhalter can finally strut his stuff as a starter.

VINCENT MANNIELLO/SPORTSCHROME



UNDER THE GUN

► As the man who'll get first crack at replacing departed right end Hugh Douglas, the Eagles' primary pass rusher the past five years, **NDUKWE KALU** got a head start in December. In the last five regular-season games he had more sacks (six) than Douglas did (4½) and seven QB pressures. He'll have to keep that up to hold off first-round pick Jerome McDougle.

The 6-foot, 222-pound Buckhalter was a backup at Nebraska for four seasons, averaging nine carries a game. A fourth-round pick in 2001, he set the Eagles' rookie rushing record as Staley's understudy, with 586 yards and a 4.5-yard average per carry. Then, in an April '02 minicamp while preparing to compete with Staley for the starting job, Buckhalter tore the ACL in his left knee and missed all last season.

Even with Staley back in camp Buckhalter, if healthy, will most likely get the bulk of the workload, 15 to 18 carries a game. Though he occasionally struggled in camp—not always picking the right hole or knowing when to make a cut—his athleticism is superior to Staley's. In one morning workout he took a handoff, cut upfield and ran past a corner and a safety. That's the kind of move that has the Eagles thinking Buckhalter is more of an all-around threat than Staley. "He's a guy who definitely can change the pace of the game," says McNabb.

One of the reasons the Eagles are trying to get quicker on offense and defense (page 70) is to avoid disasters like their 27-10 loss in the NFC Championship Game, in which Tampa Bay ran circles around Philadelphia. So look for change-of-pace back Brian Westbrook to get more than the 55 touches (46 rushing, nine receiving) he got as a rookie last year. There's little question that if Buckhalter and Westbrook combine for 22 to 25 carries a game and Staley gets the remainder, Philadelphia will have a more athletic backfield than it had last year.

In the physical NFC, though, it's just as important for running backs to be durable as athletic. "I prepared myself all through the spring and summer to be the man," Buckhalter says. "Whether it's 10, 15, 20 or 25 carries each Sunday, I know I can do it. Remember, I went to Nebraska, and all they play there is hard-nosed football. I'm ready for the hard-nosed football of the NFC. Running backs run the ball. Football's football. Don't make too much of it."

It's understandable for Eagle Nation to fret about a player coming off knee surgery and at the same time becoming an NFL starter. All that's at stake is the Super Bowl.

"There isn't a better safety in football than Dawkins; he's physical, quick and fearless."

He's an excellent drive-blocking center. . . . On defense everyone's screaming about losing Hugh Douglas, but what did he do down the stretch to help them? Nothing. I wouldn't have paid him at 32. . . . I love their tackle rotation now that **Hollis Thomas** is back. They missed his run defense when he was hurt last year. . . . They'll miss Shawn Barber's speed at outside linebacker, but **Nate Wayne**'s playmaking ability should help. He's always around the ball. . . . There isn't a better safety in football than **Brian Dawkins**; he's physical, quick and fearless.

ENEMY LINES

An opposing scout's view

The Eagles got two steals in the draft to improve their passing game: **L.J. Smith**, who might be one of the top 10 tight ends in football, in the second round and wideout **Billy McMullen** in the third. You don't lead an ACC school like Virginia in receiving four years in a row [which McMullen did] without being talented. . . . I might be in the minority, but I question **Donovan McNabb**'s accuracy. . . . I really like this offensive line, but **Jon Runyan** can be beaten by the quick defensive ends. **Tra Thomas** has better feet and plays just as strong. . . . **Hank Fraley** fooled me.

HOLLIS THOMAS



SCHEDULE

Sept. 8	TAMPA BAY (Mon.)
14	NEW ENGLAND
21	Open date
28	at Buffalo
Oct. 5	WASHINGTON
12	at Dallas
19	at N.Y. Giants
26	N.Y. JETS
Nov. 2	at Atlanta
10	at Green Bay (Mon.)
16	N.Y. GIANTS
23	NEW ORLEANS
30	at Carolina
Dec. 7	DALLAS
15	at Miami (Mon.)
21	SAN FRANCISCO
27	at Washington (Sat.)

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 3
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .541
Games against playoff teams: 6

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD: 12-4

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 7/19/10
DEFENSE 9/7/4

COACH: Andy Reid; fifth season with Philadelphia (39-25 in NFL)

CORRELL BUCKHALTER*

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	84	129	586	4.5
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
13	130	10.0	2	

DONOVAN McNABB

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	9	361	211	58.4
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
2,289	17	6	86.0	

JON RITCHIE

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	337	0	0	—
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
10	66	6.6	1	

TODD PINKSTON

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	77	60	798	7

CHAD LEWIS

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	153	42	398	3

TRA THOMAS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 7"	349 lbs.	16	16

JOHN WELBOURN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 5"	318 lbs.	11	11

HANK FRALEY

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 2"	300 lbs.	16	16

JERMANE MAYBERRY

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 4"	325 lbs.	16	16

JON RUNYAN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 7"	330 lbs.	16	16

JAMES THRASH

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	104	52	635	6

DEFENSE

RE	NDUKWE KALU	23 tackles	8 sacks
RT	DARWIN WALKER	35 tackles	7½ sacks
LT	COREY SIMON	39 tackles	2 sacks
LE	DERRICK BURGESS*	30 tackles	6 sacks
OLB	CARLOS EMMONS	60 tackles	3½ sacks
MLB	MARK SIMONEAU	7 tackles	0 sacks
OLB	NATE WAYNE	111 tackles	2½ sacks
CB	BOBBY TAYLOR	58 tackles	5 int.
SS	MICHAEL LEWIS	38 tackles	1 int.
FS	BRIAN DAWKINS	95 tackles	2 int.
CB	TROY VINCENT	67 tackles	2 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS PVR

K	DAVID AKERS	140	43/43 XPs	30/34 FGs	133 pts.
PR	BRIAN WESTBROOK	172	no NFL punt returns		
KR	BRIAN WESTBROOK	172	no NFL kickoff returns		
P	LEE JOHNSON		14 punts	27.7 avg.	

New acquisition PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 89) *2001 stats

NFC
EAST

2

NEW YORK

Giants

The offense is potent, and the special teams are revamped, but can the defense hold its own?

EVEN WITH a fractured toe, Giants defensive end Michael Strahan can be relentless. His rookie defensive linemate Osi Umenyiora discovered that during a practice session in early August, when Strahan ran through a laundry list of pass-rushing dos (always shed a blocker's hands) and don'ts (never rush the same way two times in a row), pushing and pulling the rookie throughout. At times the 11th-year All-Pro playfully ragged his charge, eliciting chuckles from veteran defensive end Keith Washington, who was standing nearby.

The scene was telling because, for the Giants, the good times will not continue unless they address their glaring need for defensive-line depth. New York's traditionally stalwart defense looked increasingly mortal last season as the shortage of quality replacements resulted in an overworked front four. Those players' exhaustion meant a diminished pass rush—New York had only 37 sacks and forced just 11 interceptions—and the Giants ended up allowing 130 fourth-quarter points, tied for second most in the league.

Never was the problem more evident than last Jan. 5 when, holding a 38–14 lead over San Francisco late in the third quarter of a wild-card playoff game, the Giants gave up 25 consecutive points in a

shocking 39–38 loss. Because the game ended on a botched New York field goal attempt, much was made of the Giants' myriad special teams needs, but make no mistake—at the root of the Giants' problems was an ineffective defense.

"We didn't have the luxury of being tired last year," says Strahan, whose sack

total fell to 11 last year after an NFL-record 22½ in 2001. "We need quality guys who would let us grab a breather and be up for the fourth quarter. Our kids are good, but

TEAMWORK If Strahan (92) gets more help and a few more breathers, the Giants may have what it takes to go the distance.



PETER READ MILLER

UNDER THE GUN

► Playing for four years in Cleveland's harsh climes, **RYAN KUEHL** had just one bad snap. Of course the Giants know just how costly one snap can be. After a bad snap botched a game-winning field goal attempt in last season's 39–38 playoff loss to the 49ers, coach Jim Fassel signed free agent Kuehl to a five-year, \$3.62 million deal.



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they need to be ready now, not two years from now."

The new cavalry members are an upgrade over last year's bunch, particularly rookies William Joseph, drafted 25th overall out of Miami, and Umenyiora, a quick 278-pounder from Troy State who was a second-round selection. With 32-year-old starting tackle Keith Hamilton returning from a right Achilles tear that ended his season in Week 6 (assuming he avoids league suspension after being charged in May with possession of cocaine), and fourth-year tackle Cornelius Griffin on the decline, Joseph must contribute immediately. Umenyiora might spell Strahan occasionally and will rotate series with starting right end Kenny Holmes, who is no longer an every-down player. "We just need to get off the field," Strahan says, "because with our offense, we can stay off for a while."

Indeed, the offense is no longer New York's redheaded stepchild. Over the final nine games of '02, the Giants morphed into a scoring leviathan, averaging 25.7 points behind the underrated captaincy of quarterback Kerry Collins and the fiery passion of rookie tight end-lightning rod Jeremy Shockey. After a preseason homophobic rant, however—his second in two seasons—Shockey's mouth remains an issue for the team. Tailback Tiki Barber (1,387 rushing yards, 69 passes) and wideout Amani Toomer (82 catches, 1,343 yards) provide Collins with multiple big-play threats.

On special teams a season's worth of gaffes brought a new kicker (Mike Hollis), punter-holder (Jeff Feagles), long snapper (Ryan Kuehl) and returner (NFL alltime return-yardage leader Brian Mitchell), who were welcomed like favorite uncles to training camp. "I feel very lucky to have gotten them all," says coach Jim Fassel. "Replacing special teams isn't like replacing a lineman, where you hope the group comes together. On their own, those guys are all difference-makers. And you know what? I think they came here because each one looked at us and thought, Hey, those guys have a chance to win it all."

Asked what could be drawn from last year's playoff ignominy, Strahan laughs. "At least it wasn't the biggest comeback in playoff history," he says. "Hopefully, we won't have to worry about it again." As long as the new dogs learn enough of Strahan's old tricks, they won't. —J.E.

ENEMY LINES

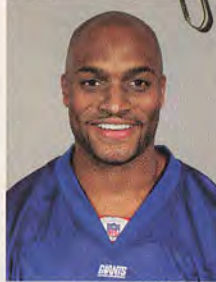
An opposing scout's view

Amani Toomer is underrated. He's faster than you think, he can run after the catch, and he makes every big play. Now the Giants just need **Ike Hilliard** to stay healthy and take pressure off Toomer and **Jeremy Shockey**. . . . In addition to bringing excitement and production to the offense, Shockey is a much better blocker than he gets credit for. But he has to keep his focus and cut down on his drops. . . . **Tiki Barber** is a great back, but he has to do it for an entire year. Even though he came on strong late last season, he also had some very average

"The O-line could be their downfall, especially on the right side. Allen is awful."

games. . . . The O-line could be the Giants' downfall, especially on the right side. **Ian Allen** is awful. I can't believe he might start. With that line **Kerry Collins** will be running for his life. He isn't mobile and isn't a very good athlete. . . . The defensive line and linebackers are solid. **Kenny Holmes** has to do more, but the rookie tackles will help. . . . Letting [cornerback] Jason Sehorn go [to the Rams by way of free agency] was a wise move. . . . The special teams upgrades were right on, especially adding **Brian Mitchell** as the return man. . . . They'll challenge Philly right to the end.

TOOMER



SCHEDULE

Sept. 7	ST. LOUIS
15	DALLAS (Mon.)
21	at Washington
28	Open date
Oct. 5	MIAMI
12	at New England
19	PHILADELPHIA
26	at Minnesota
Nov. 2	at N.Y. Jets
9	ATLANTA
16	at Philadelphia
24	at Tampa Bay (Mon.)
30	BUFFALO
Dec. 7	WASHINGTON
14	at New Orleans
21	at Dallas
28	CAROLINA

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 12
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .521
Games against playoff teams: 5

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD: 10-6

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 14/6/6
DEFENSE 16/9/9

COACH: Jim Fassel; seventh season with New York (54-41-1 in NFL)

TIKI BARBER

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	II	304	1,387	4.6
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
69	597	8.7	11	

KERRY COLLINS

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	59	545	335	61.5
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
4,073	19	14	85.4	

JIM FINN

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	317	5	8	1.6
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
6	31	5.2	0	

AMANI TOOMER

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	38	82	1,343	8

JEREMY SHOCKEY

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	74	74	894	2

LUKE PETITGOUT

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 6"	310 lbs.	16	16

RICH SEUBERT

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 5"	305 lbs.	16	16

CHRIS BOBER

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 5"	310 lbs.	15	15

DAVID DIEHL (R)

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 5"	310 lbs.	12	12

IAN ALLEN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 4"	320 lbs.	3	0

IKE HILLIARD

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	148	27	386	2

DEFENSE

RE	KENNY HOLMES	47 tackles	8 sacks
RT	KEITH HAMILTON	14 tackles	0 sacks
LT	CORNELIUS GRIFFIN	49 tackles	4 sacks
LE	MICHAEL STRAHAN	71 tackles	11 sacks
OLB	BRANDON SHORT	87 tackles	3 sacks
MLB	MIKE BARROW	110 tackles	2½ sacks
OLB	DHANI JONES	82 tackles	0 sacks
CB	WILL PETERSON	40 tackles	2 int.
SS	SHAUN WILLIAMS	90 tackles	2 int.
FS	OMAR STOUTMIRE	81 tackles	0 int.
CB	WILL ALLEN	55 tackles	1 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS PVR

K	MIKE HOLLIS	207	40/40 XPs	25/33 FGs	115 pts.
PR	BRIAN MITCHELL	290	46 ret.	12.3 avg.	1 TD
KR	BRIAN MITCHELL	290	43 ret.	27.0 avg.	0 TDs
P	JEFF FEAGLES	61 punts	41.7 avg.		

NFC
EAST

3

DALLAS

Cowboys

Saddled with the NFL's worst offensive backfield, Bill Parcells will have to scramble for solutions

IN THE second half of the Cowboys' grim preseason opener—a 13–0 loss at Arizona—it was time for some gallows humor in the Dallas radio booth. Play-by-play man Brad Sham, who has seen the great and the gruesome in his 25 seasons as a Cowboys broadcaster, said, “I’m reminded of the time when Leo Durocher took over a pretty bad Cubs team in the ’60s. He said, ‘I’ll tell you, this is no seventh-place ball club.’ He was right. The Cubs finished 10th.”

These Cowboys, complete with a new coaching savior in Bill Parcells, couldn’t be that bad, could they?

They could. They have so many holes to fill and are so deficient at key positions, compared with other teams, that Parcells will have to resort to his old standby—special teams—to be competitive.

Dallas has arguably the worst quarterback–running back combination in the league, which doesn’t bode well for a team that was last in the NFC in scoring last year—by a whopping 41 points—and has seen its total points decline in each of the past four seasons. The amazing thing is that the Cowboys knew they had Quincy Carter and Chad Hutchinson at quarterback and Troy Hambrick at running back before Parcells took over and did nothing

to upgrade either position through free agency or the draft. The receiving trio of Joey Galloway, Antonio Bryant and Terry Glenn has speed, but can the quarterbacks, who completed just 53.5% of their throws last year, get them the ball?

“If we can run it, watch out,” Parcells said during training camp. That’s a pretty

big if, especially with major questions still to be resolved on the offensive line. Wisconsin’s Al Johnson was drafted in the second round and was practically handed the

HELP WANTED Coakley has great speed, but the Cowboys need him to get to the quarterback more often.

BILL FRANKS



UNDER THE GUN

► This summer, Bill Parcells looked at film of the ’60s Packers to see how Vince Lombardi used fullback Jim Taylor in a ball-control offense. That gives you some idea of the ground-hugging offense Parcells would like to employ in Dallas with 239-pound **TROY HAMBRICK**. “I’m no Marshall Faulk,” says Hambrick. “I’m a boulder, and I like to roll downhill.”

center job; on Aug. 8 he underwent season-ending microfracture surgery on his right knee. Seven-time All-Pro guard Larry Allen, who had surgery to remove bone spurs from his left ankle last December, looked like a shell of himself in training camp. Parcells derisively took to calling him Secretariat, mocking his lack of speed and quickness.

For the first time in his 16 seasons as a head coach, Parcells has ceded control of the makeup and direction of his team's defense to an assistant. Mike Zimmer, a highly respected holdover from fired coach Dave Campo's staff, gets the honor, but there's no guarantee Parcells will stick with him. Zimmer's group has ranked 19th, fourth and 18th in total defense in his three seasons at Dallas, producing only 73 sacks in 48 games, and there's no magic pill on the horizon. The two defensive ends (Greg Ellis, Ebenezer Ekuban) and the two outside linebackers (Dexter Coakley and Al Singleton, a free-agent acquisition from Tampa Bay) combined for 10½ sacks last season. Zimmer is hoping an improved secondary will cover better and longer so the pass rush can be more effective. To that end, second-year free safety Roy Williams, the Cowboys' first-round pick in 2002, seems ready for a breakout season, and this year's top pick, Terence Newman, brings his 4.35-second speed to start at left corner.

Gone is colorful special teams coach Joe Avezzano, who never met a postgame TV or radio show he didn't like but whose outfit was nothing to talk about. Replacing him is one of the most underrated assistants in the NFL, former Bills and 49ers aide Bruce DeHaven. At every stop Parcells has made early improvements in the kicking game, and the Cowboys will be no exception. DeHaven has persuaded Parcells to make one change, switching his punt protection from man to zone. "He just wants to find the best way to do things," DeHaven says. "He doesn't care whose idea it is."

As he has done with the Giants, the Patriots and the Jets previously, Parcells will turn over the bottom of the roster throughout the season. "You're not just competing with the players in this camp," he told the team early on. "You're competing with any player from other teams that I can get my hands on." Cowboys fans be forewarned. This may be a long season, but it won't be a boring one. —P.K.

ENEMY LINES

An opposing scout's view

Everyone says the offensive line is going to be the best unit on the team, but I don't see it. I hear **Larry Allen's** not healthy, and I know how much **Bill Parcells** loved rookie center **Al Johnson** before losing him for the season with a knee injury. The other centers, **Gennaro DiNapoli** and **Matt Lehr**, are roster-fillers. . . . **Quincy Carter** is a better quarterback for this offense than **Chad Hutchinson** because his mobility will be vital behind that line. . . . I don't trust **Troy Hambrick** to be an every-down back. He's never done it. . . . **Antonio Bryant** will be as big a star as Michael Irvin if they

"Terence Newman was the best player in the draft. He'll shut down one side of the field."

can find someone to get him the ball. . . . On defense, Parcells will pay for the sins of the Cowboys' past drafts. **Ebenezer Ekuban** is a flop who's never been quick enough to turn the corner against NFC East tackles. . . . I like the addition of **Al Singleton**, just because he plays every down as if it's his last. But he can get pushed around trying to rush on the strong side. . . . **Terence Newman** was the best player in the draft. He'll shut down one side of the field. . . . If they don't blitz **Roy Williams** 10 times a game, they're nuts. He's one of the most athletic safeties to come into the league in years.

BRYANT



SCHEDULE

Sept. 7	ATLANTA
15	at N.Y. Giants (Mon.)
21	Open date
28	at N.Y. Jets
Oct. 5	ARIZONA
12	PHILADELPHIA
19	at Detroit
26	at Tampa Bay
Nov. 2	WASHINGTON
9	BUFFALO
16	at New England
23	CAROLINA
27	MIAMI (Thurs.)
Dec. 7	at Philadelphia
14	at Washington
21	N.Y. GIANTS
28	at New Orleans

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 2
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .541
Games against playoff teams: 7

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD: 5-11

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 19/31/30
DEFENSE 15/19/18

COACH: Bill Parcells;
first season with Dallas
(149-106-1 in NFL)

TROY HAMBRICK

PBS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	94	79	317	4.0
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
21	99	4.7	1	

QUINCY CARTER

PBS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
QB	135	221	125	56.6
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
1,465	7	8	72.3	

RICHIE ANDERSON

PBS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	126	5	27	5.4
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
45	257	5.7	1	

ANTONIO BRYANT

PBS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	75	44	733	6

TONY MCGEE

PBS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	174	23	294	1

FLOZELL ADAMS

PBS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 7"	357 lbs.	16	16

LARRY ALLEN

PBS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 3"	335 lbs.	5	5

GENNARO DINAPOLI

PBS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 3"	287 lbs.	16	16

ANDRE GURUDE

PBS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 4"	326 lbs.	14	14

RYAN YOUNG

PBS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 5"	320 lbs.	9	8

JOEY GALLOWAY

PBS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	106	61	908	6

DEFENSE

RE	EBENEZER EKUBAN	31 tackles	1 sack
RT	LA'ROI GLOVER	50 tackles	8½ sacks
LT	MICHAEL MYERS	35 tackles	1 sack
LE	GREG ELLIS	67 tackles	7½ sacks
OLB	AL SINGLETON	58 tackles	1 sack
MLB	DAT NGUYEN	52 tackles	1 sack
OLB	DEXTER COAKLEY	104 tackles	1 sack
CB	DEREK ROSS	56 tackles	5 int.
SS	DARREN WOODSON	50 tackles	1 int.
FS	ROY WILLIAMS	92 tackles	5 int.
CB	TERENCE NEWMAN (R)	54 tackles	5 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS PVR

K	BILLY CUNDIFF	296	25/25 XPs	12/19 FGs	61 pts.
PR	ZURIEL SMITH (R)	409	27 ret.	18.5 avg.	1 TD
KR	WOODY DANTZLER	392	27 ret.	22.3 avg.	1 TD
P	TOBY GOWIN		61 punts	41.9 avg.	

■ New acquisition (R) Rookie (statistics for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 89)



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NFC
EAST

4

WASHINGTON

Redskins

The offense is in the hands of Patrick Ramsey, but for how long? That's the key to the season

HE RETURNED to the nation's capital on a stormy Sunday in early August, bearing the hopes of a desperate coach and the scorn of a wary fan base. During his turn as the Redskins' starting quarterback last year Danny Wuerffel proved two things: 1) He knew coach Steve Spurrier's offense almost as well as the Ol' Ball Coach himself, and 2) he wasn't talented enough to run it effectively in the NFL. That's why they let him go as a free agent. Nevertheless, after a series of preseason gaffes by free-agent pickup Rob Johnson, the backup to No. 1 passer Patrick Ramsey, Spurrier re-signed Wuerffel—the quarterback with whom he won the 1996 national championship at Florida.

In 2002 Spurrier's first NFL season, the Fun 'n' Gun offense flopped not only because of poor execution at quarterback and slow, bulky personnel suited for the power-rushing attack used previously, but also because Spurrier switched passers as often as Geraldo changes wives. Into that farce stepped Ramsey, a rookie whose sterling relief performance in a 31-14 win at Tennessee in Week 5 suddenly earned him a starting shot. He lasted two weeks (losing both games) before being yanked for Shane Matthews, only to return to the lineup for the final three games (winning

the last two). Despite the reappearance of Wuerffel, offensive coaches insist that Washington's quarterback-carousel days are over, that Ramsey will have a much longer leash this time around. "Patrick's the guy, and it's not open for debate," quarterbacks coach Noah Brindise says. "He's had 90 percent of the reps in practice. He's

looked good throughout. Since we throw downfield more than most teams, we need him to be ready. We like our chances, especially with all of our new weapons."

WELL-DRILLED Redskins coaches put Ramsey through a rigorous off-season regimen to improve his footwork.

JOHN RUSSELL/AP



UNDER THE GUN

► **BRUCE SMITH**, the 40-year-old wonder, returns for a 19th season, three sacks shy of Reggie White's NFL record of 198. But midway through camp he was grouching about the notion of being turned into a pass-rush-specialist by new coordinator George Edwards. Smith needs to relax and do what he does best: get to the quarterback on third-and-long.

ENEMY LINES

An opposing scout's view

Many of them came courtesy of owner Daniel Snyder's annual spending spree. After releasing power back Stephen Davis, the Redskins lured ascendant wideout Laveranues Coles and return man-tailback Chad Morton from the Jets, added another free-agent scatback in Trung Canidate and got one of Spurrier's former Gators, speedy receiver Taylor Jacobs, with their first pick in the draft (No. 44).

Now it's up to Ramsey to make it all work. Though he had his moments last year, Ramsey was uncomfortable at the line—he played in a shotgun offense at Tulane—and had poor footwork. Redskins coaches ran Ramsey through dozens of drills in the off-season, focusing on his footwork, his ability to read defenses quickly and his options once he's flushed out of the pocket. Brindise knew the lessons had taken hold when Ramsey would "watch last year's game film and say, 'Oh, there's that drill.' He applies the stuff like it's second nature."

"With a year under my belt, I'm much more comfortable now," Ramsey says. "I know I'm the starter, that Coach Spurrier and my teammates have confidence in me." To prove his point, Ramsey brings up the signing of Coles, a restricted free agent to whom the Redskins gave a stunning seven-year, \$35 million contract. "It's almost like getting Laveranues was [the team's] way of giving me a weapon. Why sign him if they don't think I can use him?"

The addition of free-agent right guard Randy Thomas, another former Jet, improves the line, but Canidate's durability is questionable, and the absence of Davis might make it difficult for the Redskins to sustain drives and take some of the pressure off the passing game. Ramsey will have to rely on possession receiver Rod Gardner and tight end Robert Royal to help move the chains.

The Washington defense, which ranked fifth in the NFL last year but lost coordinator Marvin Lewis, is dangerously thin along the front four following the release of tackle Dan Wilkinson in a salary purge on July 29. Still, with linebacker LaVar Arrington and shutdown cornerbacks Champ Bailey and Fred Smoot, the defense has playmakers aplenty.

It all comes down to whether the offense, namely Ramsey, can get off the mark and build up a head of steam before Spurrier gets itchy again.

"With Johnson and Wuerffel as the backup QBs, they're screwed if Ramsey gets hurt."

Former defensive coordinator Marvin Lewis will be missed. Because the Redskins won't score many points, I'd be worried about the defense under new coordinator **George Edwards**. . . . Their linebackers are all big names, but **Jessie Armstead** is declining and **Jeremiah Trotter** is overrated. **LaVar Arrington** will have to be even more of a playmaker than he was last season. . . . Their corners are real good: **Champ Bailey** is among the top five cover guys, and **Fred Smoot** is borderline great. . . . I like **Patrick Ramsey**—strong arm, good size—but winning with Spurrier's system might be impossible. It

doesn't give the quarterback a lot of checks and doesn't use the running back. . . . Losing Stephen Davis was big; they don't have a back who can sustain drives. . . . **Laveranues Coles** gives Ramsey a legitimate first-option receiver, but **Taylor Jacobs** is probably a year away. . . . Their line has been overrated the last few years. **Chris Samuels** regressed last year, and **Jon Jansen** has been sliding for a while. . . . Without a big-time tight end or back, they'll struggle to move the ball. And with **Rob Johnson** and **Danny Wuerffel** as Ramsey's backups, they are screwed if he gets hurt.

SMOOT



SCHEDULE

Sept. 4	N.Y. JETS (Thurs.)
14	at Atlanta
21	N.Y. GIANTS
28	NEW ENGLAND
Oct. 5	at Philadelphia
12	TAMPA BAY
19	at Buffalo
26	Open date
Nov. 2	at Dallas
9	SEATTLE
16	at Carolina
23	at Miami
30	NEW ORLEANS
Dec. 7	at N.Y. Giants
14	DALLAS
21	at Chicago
27	PHILADELPHIA (Sat.)

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 8
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .537
Games against playoff teams: 7

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD: 7-9

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 13/21/20
DEFENSE 12/5/5

COACH: Steve Spurrier;
second season with
Washington (7-9 in NFL)

TRUNG CANIDATE

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	63	17	48	2.8
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
4	31	7.8	0	

PATRICK RAMSEY

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	125	227	117	51.5
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
1,539	9	8	71.8	

BRYAN JOHNSON

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	398	1	0	0.0
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
15	114	7.6	0	

LAVERANUES COLES

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	56	89	1,264	5

ROBERT ROYAL*

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	224	18	224	1

CHRIS SAMUELS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 5"	303 lbs.	15	15

DAVE FIORE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 4"	290 lbs.	3	3

LARRY MOORE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 2"	302 lbs.	16	16

RANDY THOMAS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 4"	301 lbs.	16	16

JON JANSEN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 6"	306 lbs.	16	16

ROD GARDNER

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	90	71	1,006	8

DEFENSE

RE	BRUCE SMITH	49 tackles	9 sacks
RT	BERNARD HOLSEY	5 tackles	1 sack
LT	JERMAINE HALEY	27 tackles	1/2 sack
LE	RENALDO WYNN	41 tackles	2 1/2 sacks
OLB	LAVAR ARRINGTON	95 tackles	11 sacks
MLB	JEREMIAH TROTTER	91 tackles	1 int.
OLB	JESSIE ARMSTEAD	100 tackles	3 sacks
CB	FRED SMOOT	61 tackles	4 int.
SS	IFEANYI OHALETE	59 tackles	3 int.
FS	MATT BOWEN	45 tackles	1 int.
CB	CHAMP BAILEY	68 tackles	3 int.

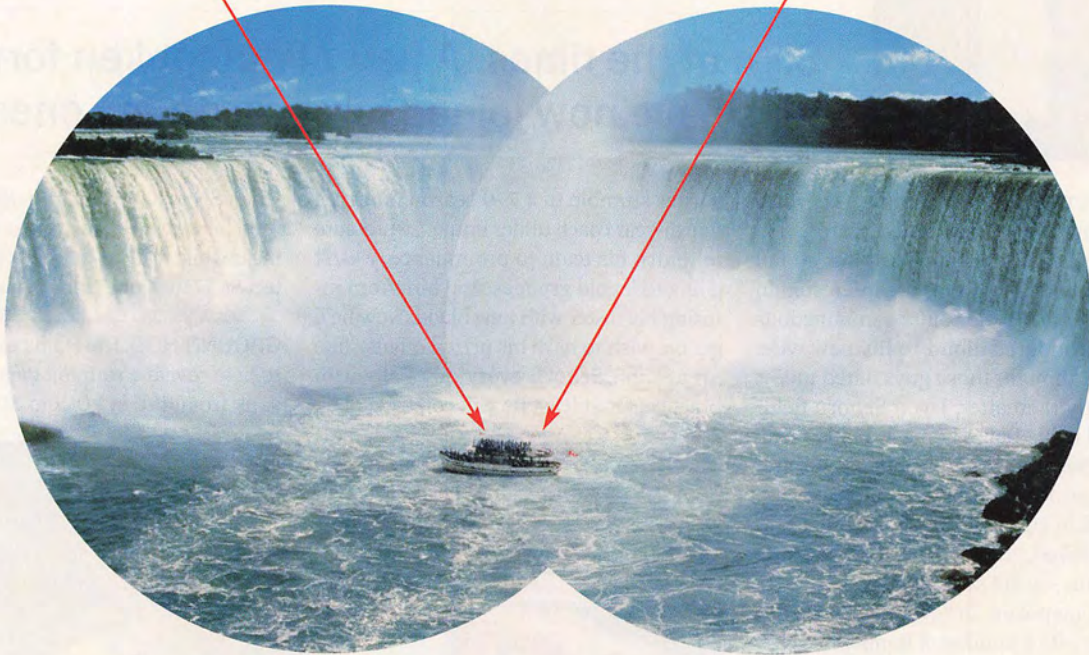
SPECIAL TEAMS

PVR				
K	JOHN HALL	215	35/37 XPs	24/31 FGs
PR	CHAD MORTON	252	4 ret.	12.8 avg.
KR	CHAD MORTON	252	58 ret.	26.0 avg.
P	BRYAN BARKER		48 punts	40.1 avg.

New acquisition PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 89) *Statistics for 2001 college year

four disposable waterproof cameras: \$60

Niagara Falls "Maid of the Mist" boat tour: \$40



hearing them say "awesome" and, for once, agreeing: priceless

NFC
WEST

1

ST. LOUIS

Rams

Sign of the times: A pair of outspoken former foes have now joined forces with the enemy

KYLE TURLEY was checking his voice mail from a Maui beach last March, and what he heard almost caused him to fall off his chair. "The Rams are interested in trading for me?" the Saints' rambunctious tackle wondered aloud to his new wife, Stacy. "I thought those guys hated me."

Shortly thereafter, Jason Sehorn fielded a call to his Dallas home from his agent, Jimmy Sexton, who informed the former Giants cornerback that the Rams were interested in signing him. "Are you sure?" Sehorn asked. "Did you talk to Mike Martz about this, or did someone else call?"

The outspoken Turley had had his differences with a number of Rams while New Orleans and St. Louis were forging a spirited NFC West rivalry that was interrupted by realignment last year. Sehorn, after criticizing the Rams for lacking patience on offense following a 2001 game, became a target of Martz's barbs, including the coach's assertion, "I'd like to line up against Jason Sehorn every day of the week."

Yet there were the former Ram-slammers, Turley and Sehorn, at their new team's training camp at Western Illinois in early August. As they cooled off in a swimming pool, each remarked to the other, "It's amazing the way things turn around."

Things happen when Super Bowl fa-

vorites stumble to a 7-9 season. Martz, a fourth-year coach under immense pressure to return his team to prominence, wasn't going to let old grudges stop him from infusing his roster with new blood. Now he'll get his wish to have his prized offense line up against Sehorn every day—albeit in practice. Or at least he will come October,

when Sehorn returns from the broken left foot he suffered early in camp. Turley, meanwhile, will be counted on to help protect St. Louis's fine china (quarterback Kurt

GROUND HOG The Rams expect Turley to help revive a running game that sank from fifth in 2001 to 30th last year.

DAVID E. KLUTHO



UNDER THE GUN

► Considered a reach by some when the Rams took him in the first round of the '02 draft, undersized linebacker **ROBERT THOMAS** did little as a rookie to silence his skeptics while starting 10 games on the outside. Now the Rams are moving him to the middle to replace the disappointing Jamie Duncan; they hope Thomas can become a tackling dynamo.

Warner and running back Marshall Faulk) from the cracks it suffered in 2002.

"People don't understand players and coaches during the season," Martz says. "It's a very highly emotional time, and you make comments about things you've got no business making comments about. I thought Kyle Turley was as fierce a competitor as there was in football, and I wanted him on my team. And Jason Sehorn? He calls another coach out on how he calls plays? You like that he's that emotional, and you want guys like that on your side."

Martz, just two years removed from a Super Bowl loss to the Patriots, can use all the help he can get. Last December, Rams president John Shaw said that Martz was "definitely under pressure to win" in 2003.

Injuries were a big reason for St. Louis's decline in 2002, but now that Warner's right hand and Faulk's right ankle have apparently healed, the Rams will once again count on a high-powered offense that oozes bravado and speed. But with Turley in the lineup, opponents are no longer likely to dismiss St. Louis as a finesse team, as Turley once did. That much was made clear early in camp when, during an 11-on-11 drill, defensive back Aeneas Williams intercepted a Warner pass and started cruising toward the end zone. Turley ran down Williams and shoved him out of bounds.

Turley, known for his play-through-the-whistle approach in his five seasons in New Orleans, was put on the trading block after the Saints balked at his contract demands. The Rams acquired him for a second-round pick in 2004, then signed him to a six-year, \$26.5 million deal. "I give Mike Martz a lot of credit," says Turley. "He was able to put aside all of that crap from the past and recognize the passion I bring to the game."

Sehorn, a nine-year veteran who was waived by the Giants in March after struggling with injuries the past several seasons, signed a one-year, \$1 million contract in May, then set about making the move to free safety. Martz says Sehorn was "everything we'd hoped he'd be" before injuring his foot, forcing Williams to shift to safety to replace him. The coach expects Williams to be back at corner when Sehorn returns.

"Kyle and I are loving it here, and it feels like we belong," Sehorn says. "In this league you never know when you'll be staring the enemy in the face—and he's no longer the enemy." —Michael Silver

ENEMY LINES

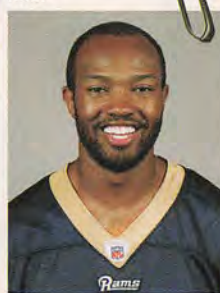
An opposing scout's view

The best player in the league is number 28 [Marshall Faulk], and he has been for the last three or four years. Pound-for-pound, he's one of the toughest players in the NFL. . . . Even if Kurt Warner isn't healthy, this team is still dangerous. He and Marc Bulger are very similar guys. Bulger's release isn't as quick as Kurt's, but he hangs in there and is willing to take a little more punishment. . . . Now that James Hodgins is gone, they don't really have a fullback, but I think they're even scarier when they go one-back and spread you out. . . . Isaac Bruce, who was never a burner, has

"They think they can make a safety out of Jason Sehorn, but I'm not convinced."

leveled off a bit, and Torrey Holt has risen to that high level. It's not just speed with him anymore; he can beat you off a lot of routes and handles press coverage better. . . . Which Jimmy Kennedy will we see? At Penn State there were games he dominated, and other times he disappeared. . . . Tommy Polley seems too tall and thin to play linebacker, but he's their best guy. . . . They think they can make a safety out of Jason Sehorn, but I'm not convinced. As a corner he wasn't very physical. . . . I'll say this about their defense: It's very well coached, thanks to Lovie Smith.

HOLT



SCHEDULE

Sept. 7	at N.Y. Giants
14	SAN FRANCISCO
21	at Seattle
28	ARIZONA
Oct. 5	Open date
13	ATLANTA (Mon.)
19	GREEN BAY
26	at Pittsburgh
Nov. 2	at San Francisco
9	BALTIMORE
16	at Chicago
23	at Arizona
30	MINNESOTA
Dec. 8	at Cleveland (Mon.)
14	SEATTLE
21	CINCINNATI
28	at Detroit

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 28
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .457
Games against playoff teams: 7

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD: 7-9

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 30/2/13

DEFENSE 14/12/13

COACH: Mike Martz; fourth season with St. Louis (31-17 in NFL)

MARSHALL FAULK

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	4	212	953	4.5
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
80	537	6.7	10	

KURT WARNER

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	10	220	144	65.5
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
1,431	3	11	67.4	

TORREY HOLT

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	30	91	1,302	4

BRANDON MANUMALEUNA

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	146	8	106	1

ORLANDO PACE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 7"	325 lbs.	10	10

ANDY MCCOLLUM

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 4"	300 lbs.	16	16

DAVE WOHLABAUGH

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 3"	296 lbs.	12	12

ADAM TIMMERMAN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 4"	310 lbs.	16	16

KYLE TURLEY

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 5"	300 lbs.	16	16

TROY EDWARDS

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	149	18	157	2

ISAAC BRUCE

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	60	79	1,075	7

DEFENSE

RE	GRANT WISTROM	47 tackles	4½ sacks
RT	RYAN PICKETT	67 tackles	½ sack
LT	DAMIONE LEWIS	20 tackles	4 sacks
LE	LEONARD LITTLE	44 tackles	12 sacks
OLB	PISA TINOISAMOA (R)	129 tackles	6½ sacks
MLB	ROBERT THOMAS	37 tackles	0 sacks
OLB	TOMMY POLLEY	57 tackles	0 sacks
CB	TRAVIS FISHER	61 tackles	2 int.
SS	ADAM ARCHULETA	108 tackles	2½ sacks
FS	AENEAS WILLIAMS	29 tackles	1 int.
CB	JERAMETRIUS BUTLER	2 tackles	0 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS PVR

K	JEFF WILKINS	193	37/37 XPs	19/25 FGs	94 pts.
PR	ARLEN HARRIS (R)	408	1 ret.	15.0 avg.	0 TDs
KR	ARLEN HARRIS (R)	408	no kickoff returns		
P	SEAN LANDETA		52 punts	42.9 avg.	

New acquisition (R) Rookie (statistics for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 89)

NFC
WEST

2

SAN FRANCISCO 49ers

A new coach and his aggressive approach give this aging group hope for one more title shot

WITH HIS team trailing by 22 points and 50 seconds remaining in the first half of a divisional playoff at Tampa Bay last January, 49ers coach Steve Mariucci watched halfback Garrison Hearst run nine yards to the San Francisco 40-yard line, swallowed his two remaining timeouts and ordered his players to the locker room. Several roared their disapproval; quarterback Jeff Garcia seethed. "There was a sense of giving up," he says, recalling one of the more ignominious moments in franchise history. "It showed the blood that was starting to pour out of us, and it took away some of our hunger to come back and try to win."

Gone in 50 Seconds would have been a fitting title for the 49ers' 2002 highlight film, with Mariucci's decision to kill the clock halfway through his team's 31-6 defeat by the Buccaneers as the lasting image of a mercurial season. Gone was the glow of San Francisco's stirring 24-point comeback win in the wild-card playoff against the Giants the previous week. Gone, three days after the Tampa Bay game, was Mariucci, fired by owner John York.

No one suggested that the Niners, who finished the season 11-7 (including playoffs), would have beaten the eventual Super Bowl champion Bucs had San Francisco scored before halftime, but Mariucci's pas-

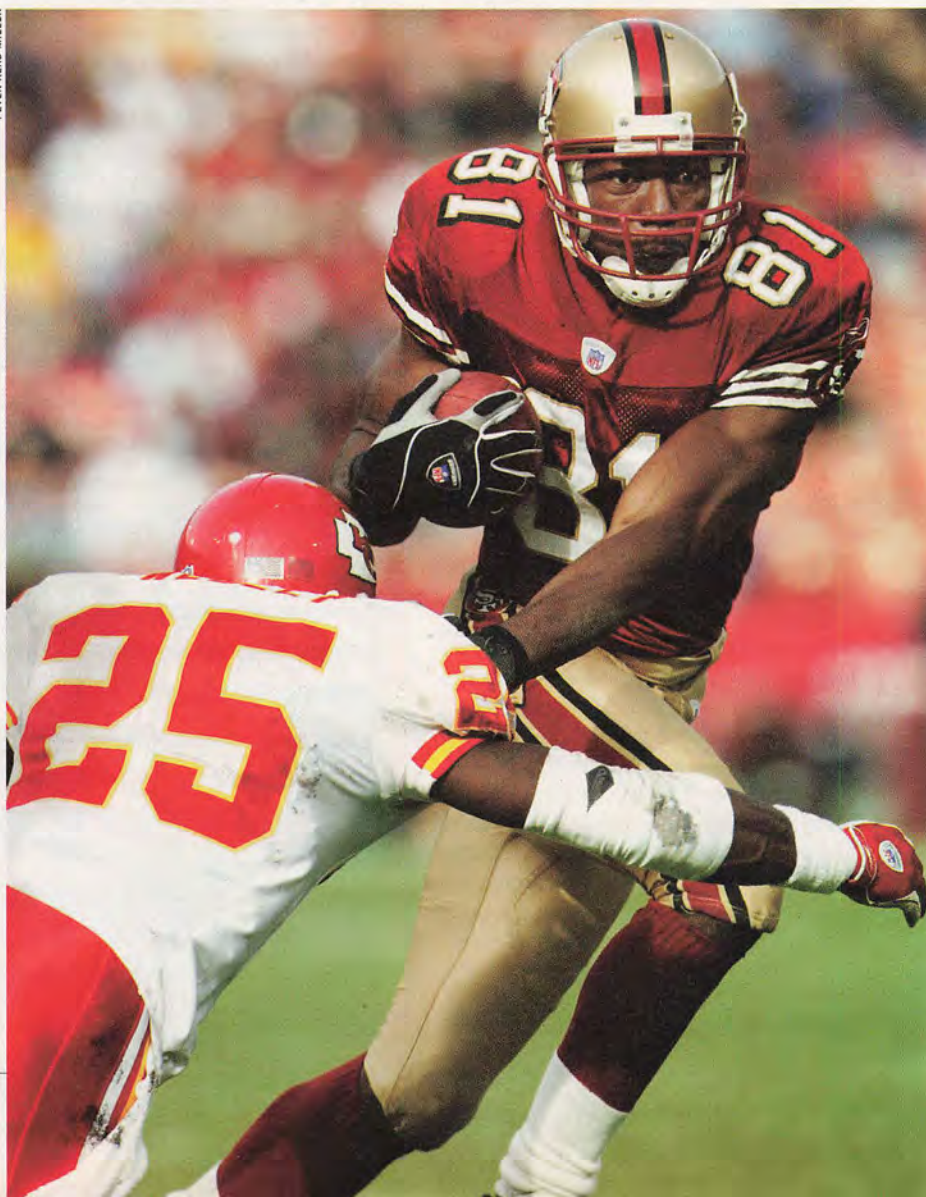
sivity was fuel for the coach's critics. "It was almost like a dog getting whapped, and he tucked his tail between his legs," says All-Pro wideout Terrell Owens. "When people come up with reasons why he was fired, a lot of them refer to that game. I think now we'll be more aggressive, more creative."

That's because York and general man-

ager Terry Donahue replaced Mariucci with former Seahawks coach Dennis Erickson, who brings a vertical twist to the West Coast offense. Erickson retained Mariucci's

TURN IT UP Explosive players such as Garcia and Owens (below) weren't happy that Mariucci liked to sit on leads.

PETER READ MILLER



UNDER THE GUN

► With J.J. Stokes gone and starters Terrell Owens and Tai Streets eligible for free agency after 2003, the 49ers need to develop a wideout. The pressure is on No. 3 receiver **CEDRICK WILSON**, a sixth-round pick in '01 who caught 15 passes last season, to emerge as that player. Wilson showed up for camp stronger and more assertive.

offensive coordinator, Greg Knapp, and kept the terminology installed by system architect Bill Walsh, who remains as a front-office consultant. Yet Erickson says there will be changes. "I'm different than Steve in terms of our personalities and some of our philosophies," he says. Consider this 56-year-old golf enthusiast's *Tin Cup* style on the links: "I'm not going to lay up. I'm going to try to hit it over the water every time."

Garcia is all for that approach. Though he was a Pro Bowl selection for the third straight year in 2002, Garcia had only 21 touch-down passes after having thrown 63 in the previous two seasons combined. Owens, football's preeminent receiver, had a personal-best 100 catches, but the 49ers averaged a mere 6.26 yards per pass attempt, one of the lowest figures in franchise history. "The system hasn't changed, but the emphasis has," says Garcia, who has been slowed in training camp by a bulging disk in his back. "In different ways Coach Erickson has said, Let's not be afraid to put the ball downfield, to make things happen."

Erickson says there will be more single-back sets and two-tight-end formations. He'll run the ball out of three-wideout sets and put players such as Owens and punishing fullback Fred Beasley, the key to the NFL's sixth-ranked rushing attack, in motion more often. Also, Garcia will be encouraged to audible, particularly when Owens gets single coverage and there's an opportunity to throw deep.

That should please Garcia and Owens, both of whom criticized Mariucci in previous seasons for sitting on leads. "I don't think any lead is safe," says Erickson, who as Seahawks coach from 1995 through '98 went 31-33 before returning to the college ranks and transforming Oregon State from a patsy into a Fiesta Bowl winner in 2000.

There's a sense of urgency surrounding defending NFC West champion San Francisco. Owens's potential free-agent departure—the outspoken star may be too expensive for York's cost-conscious tastes—is one more reason for the 49ers to force the issue in 2003. "Fans are going to see something different on the field, an aggressiveness on both sides of the ball," Garcia insists. "We want to be the killer, instead of being the one waiting around for someone to die."

—M.S.

ENEMY LINES

An opposing scout's view

Jeff Garcia's their most important player, but if his cranky back doesn't hold up, backup **Tim Rattay** makes them a question mark at quarterback. Rattay's intelligent and has talent, so he's got a chance to be productive. . . . It's time for **Tai Streets** to become a force; if not, there'll be a void at wide receiver. . . . [Rookie tackle] **Kwame Harris** has Pro Bowl ability; he'll emerge as a stand-out lineman, though maybe not this year. I don't know how **Derrick Deese** does it: He's limited athletically, but he's also a very aggressive, tough guy. . . . **Kevan Barlow** should be ready to take over the half-

"Harris has Pro Bowl ability; he'll emerge as a standout lineman, though maybe not this year."

back job—it could be a breakout year for him. . . . **Bryant Young**'s not what he was before all the injuries, but he's still solid at defensive tackle. **Jim Flanigan**'s a dirt-sucker, and you need those. . . . **Julian Peterson**'s a smart, active linebacker who's in the right place at the right time. He makes plays because of his instincts. . . . The secondary doesn't do much for me. **Ahmed Plummer** struggles in the vertical game; good receivers beat him on the deep cutouts. **Jason Webster**'s not good on deep coverage, either, but he's fine on short- to medium-range patterns.

HARRIS



SCHEDULE

Sept.	7	CHICAGO
	14	at St. Louis
	21	CLEVELAND
	28	at Minnesota
Oct.	5	DETROIT
	12	at Seattle
	19	TAMPA BAY
	26	at Arizona
Nov.	2	ST. LOUIS
	9	Open date
	17	PITTSBURGH (Mon.)
	23	at Green Bay
	30	at Baltimore
Dec.	7	ARIZONA
	14	at Cincinnati
	21	at Philadelphia
	27	SEATTLE (Sat.)

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 29
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .451
Games against playoff teams: 5

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD: 10-6

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 6/14/8
DEFENSE 7/22/14

COACH: Dennis Erickson;
first season with
San Francisco (31-33 in
NFL)

GARRISON HEARST

POS.	PVR	ATT.	TDs	AVG.
RB	69	215	972	4.5
REC	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
48	317	6.6	9	

JEFF GARCIA

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	33	528	328	62.1
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
3,344	21	10	85.6	

FRED BEASLEY

POS.	PVR	ATT.	TDs	AVG.
FB	187	26	75	2.9
REC	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
22	152	6.9	1	

TERRELL OWENS

POS.	PVR	REC	YARDS	TDs
WR	7	100	1,300	13

JED WEAVER

POS.	PVR	REC	YARDS	TDs
TE	258	6	75	3

DERRICK DEESE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS	STARTS
LT	6' 3"	289 lbs.	14	14

ERIC HEITMANN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS	STARTS
LG	6' 3"	305 lbs.	16	12

JEREMY NEWBERRY

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS	STARTS
C	6' 5"	310 lbs.	16	16

RON STONE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS	STARTS
RG	6' 5"	325 lbs.	15	15

SCOTT GRAGG

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS	STARTS
RT	6' 8"	315 lbs.	16	16

TAI STREETS

POS.	PVR	REC	YARDS	TDs
WR	107	72	756	5

DEFENSE

RE	ANDRE CARTER	54 tackles	12½ sacks
RT	JIM FLANIGAN	12 tackles	1 sack
LT	BRYANT YOUNG	36 tackles	2 sacks
LE	JOHN ENGELBERGER	10 tackles	0 sacks
OLB	JULIAN PETERSON	96 tackles	2 sacks
ILB	JEFF ULBRICH	68 tackles	½ sacks
ILB	DEREK SMITH	112 tackles	1 sack
CB	JASON WEBSTER	85 tackles	1 int.
SS	TONY PARRISH	72 tackles	7 int.
FS	ZACK BRONSON	21 tackles	3 int.
CB	AHMED PLUMMER	63 tackles	1 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS PVR

K	JEFF CHANDLER	200	14/14 XPs	8/12 FGs	38 pts.
PR	JIMMY WILLIAMS	444	20 ret.	16.8 avg.	1 TD
KR	JIMMY WILLIAMS	444	35 ret.	21.9 avg.	0 TDs
P	BILLY LAFLEUR		22 punts	36.6 avg.	

New acquisition PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 89)

NFC
WEST

3

SEATTLE

Seahawks

A defense that got run over last season has been revived by the hiring of Ray Rhodes

LAST DECEMBER, as the Seahawks completed their third consecutive season without a playoff appearance, Mike Holmgren's fate seemed sealed. Despite a strong finish to salvage a 7-9 record, Seattle remained mired in the mediocrity that is the hallmark of the franchise's 26-year history. Holmgren, the team's executive vice president/general manager/head coach—or, to his players, the Big Show—was paid handsomely to change all that, but at the conclusion of his fourth choppy season, his record stood at 31-33. Conventional wisdom had owner Paul Allen firing Holmgren, or at least asking him to surrender his general manager's role, though the notion that Holmgren would agree to the latter scenario was about as likely as Starbucks restricting its menu to regular coffee.

Yet Holmgren did agree to give up the G.M. title, and he has returned for another season. Whether the Big Show is back in 2004 will be up to Allen, who brought in Bob Ferguson as his new general manager. But Holmgren's fate may well lie with the players on his defensive unit and with his new defensive coordinator, Ray Rhodes.

"The way we look at it, everybody's on a one-year contract," says cornerback Shawn Springs, a former All-Pro who has

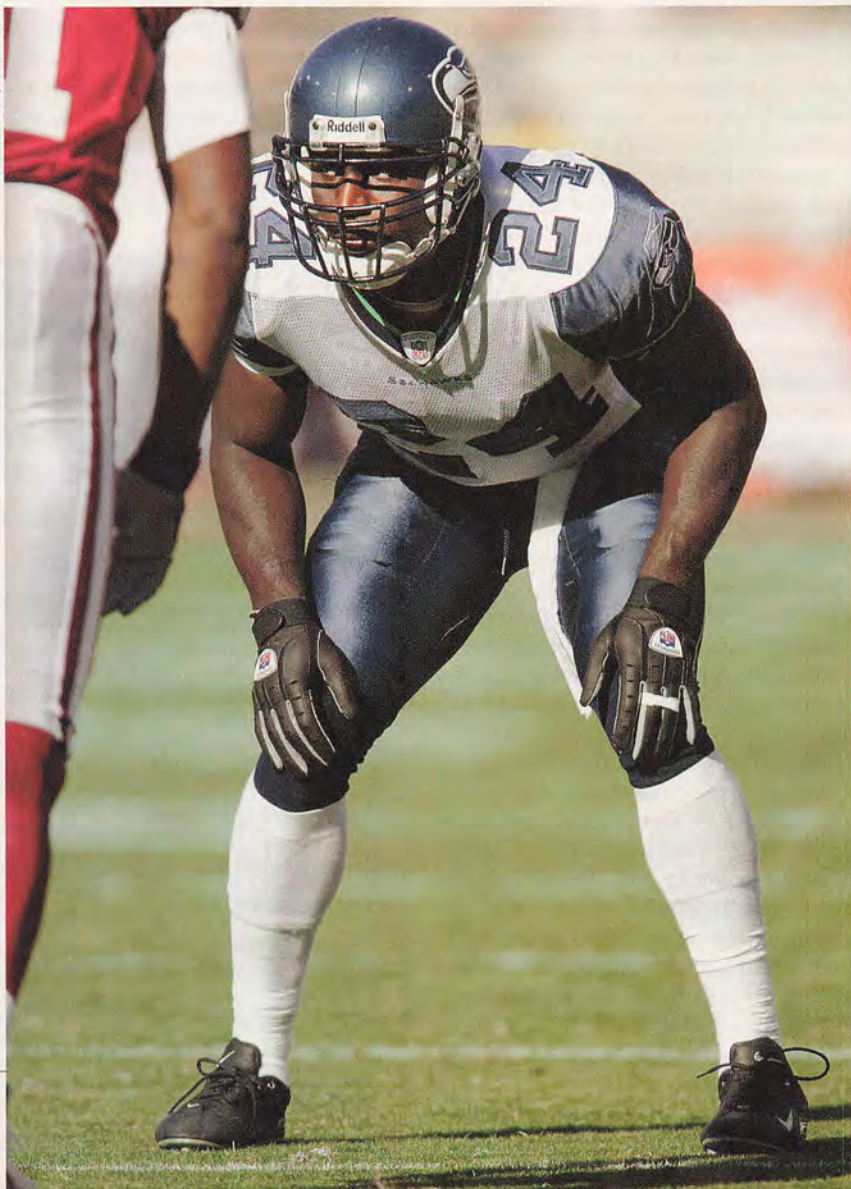
been beset by injuries and inconsistency during Holmgren's tenure and who, coincidentally, is in the final year of his contract. "We need to produce this season or we're probably gone."

Holmgren's impressive run of success as the Packers' coach from 1992 to '98, which included a Super Bowl win and a title-game

appearance in back-to-back seasons, began with Rhodes calling the shots on defense. Rhodes's successor in Green Bay, Fritz Shurmur, made the move to Seattle with

ON THE REBOUND Healthy at last, the ever-confident Springs has his sights set on returning to his old Pro Bowl form.

STEPHEN DUNN/GETTY IMAGES



UNDER THE GUN

► **MATT HASSELBECK** was smoking hot over the final six games last season, directing an offense that averaged an NFL-high 476 yards a game during that span. But most of those games were against nonplayoff teams with poor defenses. If Hasselbeck is going to become a top quarterback, he'll have to be productive when it counts.

Holmgren in '99, and the defense, which was loaded with talented players, seemed poised to become a dominant unit. But Shurmur died in late August '99 after a short bout with cancer, and neither his replacement, Jim Lind, nor Steve Sidwell, who was hired in 2000, had much success.

Meanwhile, Rhodes, who originally left Green Bay to become the head coach in Philadelphia and later returned to the Packers as Holmgren's successor—going 8–8 in his lone season—had since moved on to Denver as the Broncos' defensive coordinator. When he resigned there last January after two seasons, Holmgren quickly lured him to the Pacific Northwest. Rhodes made an immediate impact by persuading Springs to rescind his request to be traded. He then set about instilling a more aggressive approach in a unit that last year allowed the most rushing yards in the NFL. On the personnel side, the trade with the Saints for defensive tackle Norman Hand and the free-agent signing of middle linebacker Randall Godfrey, along with the selection of cornerback Marcus Trufant and safety Ken Hamlin in the first two rounds of the draft, have given the Seahawks even more cause for optimism.

"Last year we'd wait to see how the offense was attacking us before figuring out what we were going to do," says outside linebacker Anthony Simmons, a fast, rangy defender who missed nine games in 2002 with an ankle injury. "Now, we don't care what you're doing—we're coming after you whether we're up by 30 or down by 30."

No one has felt the pain of the defense's failures more than Springs. "He came in with such fanfare and had such success early on, it was like people thought a defensive back was going to save the franchise," says outside linebacker Chad Brown. "Then he started having problems with his hamstring, and that's the worst injury a defensive back can have. It's hard to cover receivers when your turbo button is broken."

If Springs can finally escape injury—last year, he was slowed by a sore right foot—Seattle's secondary could again have a bona fide star. "When I'm healthy, I think I'm by far the Number 1 cornerback in the league, and believe me, I watch everybody," says Springs. "I've got a good coach now, and I think I'm going to dominate."

For Holmgren & Co., that can't happen a moment too soon.

"Marcus Trufant has a chance to be as good a corner as there is in the league."

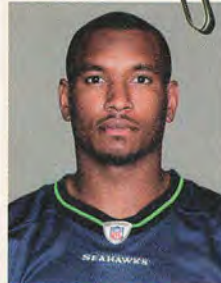
player. . . . Defensively, I think they'll be better, largely because of [coordinator] **Ray Rhodes**. They're strong at corner, with **Shawn Springs** and **Marcus Trufant**, who has a chance to be as good a corner as there is in the league. . . . Rhodes will set up a defense where **Norman Hand** and **Chad Eaton** clog the middle and allow those linebackers to run. . . . I like all the guys they picked up—**Hand**, **Randall Godfrey**, who was still productive last year, and especially **Chike Okefor**. He'll surprise you with his ability to play the run, and he'll get after you as a pass rusher.

ENEMY LINES

An opposing scout's view

The offense was so hot at the end of last season, but I'm still not a big believer in **Matt Hasselbeck** when the game is on the line. . . . I've never been a huge **Shaun Alexander** fan, either. He's fast, but he's a straight-line runner who's not very elusive. . . . **Koren Robinson** and **Darrell Jackson** are excellent, and **Bobby Engram** is an ideal third receiver—not flashy, but productive. . . . Assuming the Seahawks work out their contract problems with **Walter Jones**, the offensive line could be very, very good. **Chris Terry** was a hell of a pickup last year, and **Steve Hutchinson** is a punishing inside

ENGRAM



SCHEDULE

Sept. 7	NEW ORLEANS
14	at Arizona
21	ST. LOUIS
28	Open date
Oct. 5	at Green Bay
12	SAN FRANCISCO
19	CHICAGO
26	at Cincinnati
Nov. 2	PITTSBURGH
9	at Washington
16	DETROIT
23	at Baltimore
30	CLEVELAND
Dec. 7	at Minnesota
14	at St. Louis
21	ARIZONA
27	at San Francisco (Sat.)

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 31
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .443
Games against playoff teams: 5

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD: 7–9

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 20/3/7
DEFENSE 32/18/28

COACH: Mike Holmgren;
fifth season with Seattle
(106–70 in NFL)

SHAUN ALEXANDER

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	14	295	1,175	4.0
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
59	460	7.8	18	

MATT HASSELBECK

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	64	419	267	63.7
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
3,075	15	10	87.8	

MACK STRONG

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	275	23	94	4.1
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
22	120	5.5	2	

KOREN ROBINSON

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	65	78	1,240	5

ITULA MILI

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	137	43	508	2

WALTER JONES

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 5"	308 lbs.	14	14

STEVE HUTCHINSON

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 5"	313 lbs.	4	4

ROBBIE TOBECK

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 4"	297 lbs.	16	16

CHRIS GRAY

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 4"	308 lbs.	16	16

CHRIS TERRY

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 5"	295 lbs.	15	15

DARRELL JACKSON

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	100	62	877	4

DEFENSE

RE	CHIKE OKEFOR	43 tackles	6 sacks
RT	CHAD EATON	73 tackles	1 sack
LT	NORMAN HAND	39 tackles	2½ sacks
LE	ANTONIO COCHRAN	52 tackles	3 sacks
OLB	ANTHONY SIMMONS	46 tackles	1 sack
MLB	RANDALL GODFREY	32 tackles	1 sack
OLB	CHAD BROWN	50 tackles	6 sacks
CB	SHAWN SPRINGS	59 tackles	3 int.
SS	REGGIE TONGUE	93 tackles	5 int.
FS	DAMIEN ROBINSON	73 tackles	2 int.
CB	KEN LUCAS	82 tackles	3 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS PVR

K	JOSH BROWN (R)	250	46/46 XPs	14/18 FGs	88 pts.
PR	BOBBY ENGRAM	240	21 ret.	10.7 avg.	1 TD
KR	MAURICE MORRIS	284	34 ret.	24.1 avg.	1 TD
P	RODNEY WILLIAMS*	91 punts	42.9 avg.		

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NFC
WEST

4

ARIZONA

Cardinals

The new quarterback talks a good game, but his defensive teammates rarely play one

LISTENING TO Jeff Blake talk about this year's Cardinals, you want to shake him, snap him out of his delusional state. Blake, Arizona's new starting quarterback, is discussing his team's prospects this year. "I guarantee you, we are going to turn this franchise around—myself, Emmitt and Coach Mac," says Blake. "Every year, a team no one thinks is any good goes to the playoffs. I've played in the worst place there is, and I'm telling you, this team will win some games." He says this with a megawatt smile lighting up his face. Which seems appropriate—until you realize he's not joking.

Blake, who started for the Bengals from 1994 to '99, does know something about losing. And he's right in thinking that the Cardinals have a way to go to usurp the Bengals' title as the NFL's worst franchise. But one glance at their inexperienced, wafer-thin roster suggests the Cardinals are on that course. Arizona's off-season signing of Emmitt Smith, the NFL's all-time leading rusher, provided a slight p.r. bounce, but it can't mask the Cardinals' grim reality. They lost a number of key players to free agency, including their starting quarterback, tarnished golden boy Jake Plummer, and their top three wide-outs from 2002, the most notable being former Pro Bowler David Boston.

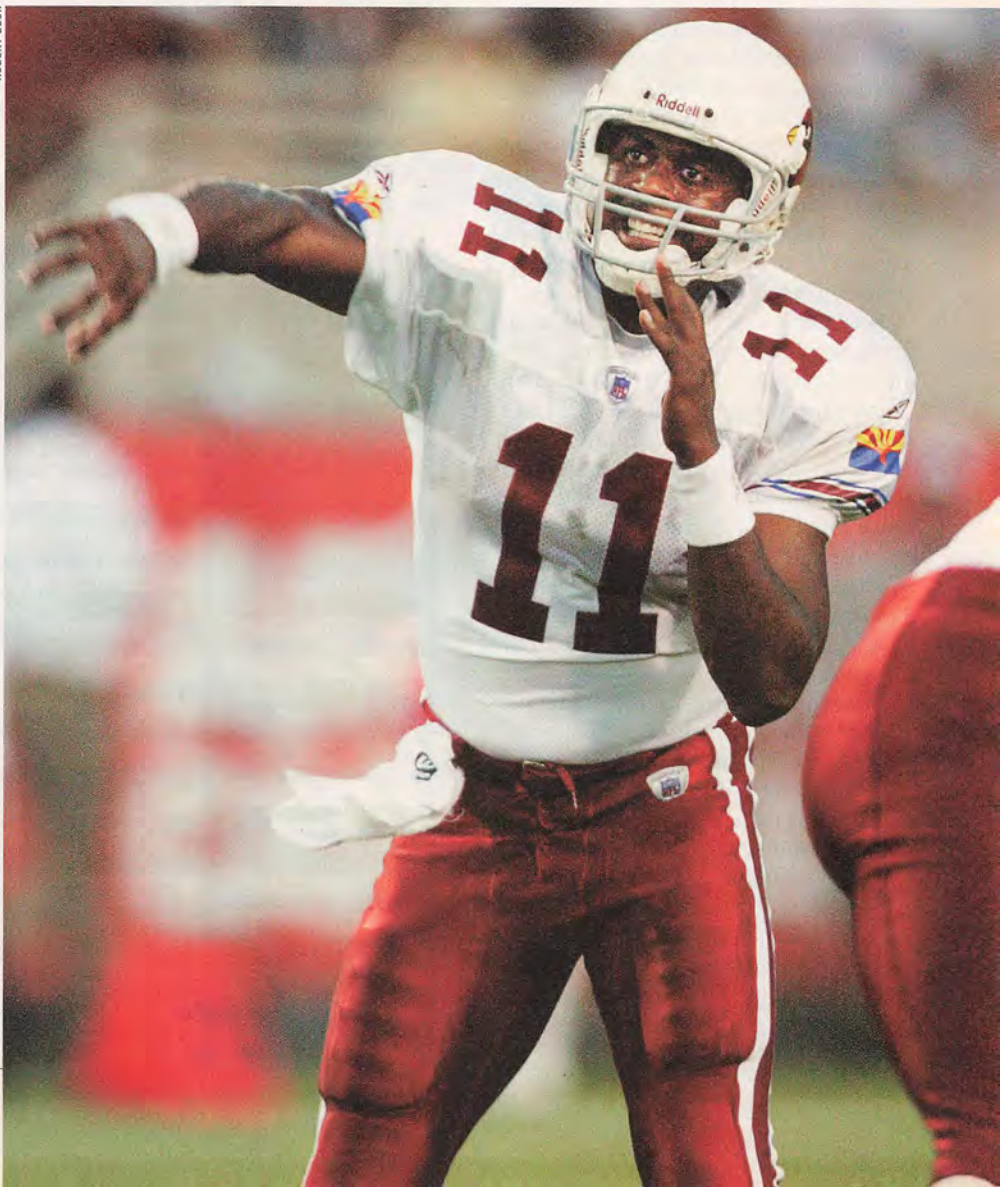
Despite a nonexistent pass rush, they chose not to take local Arizona State end Terrell Suggs, whose NCAA-record 24 sacks as a senior were more than the Cardinals' total (21) in '02. And their most significant addition after dropping 10 of their last 11 games a year ago? A much-maligned quarterback who is playing for

his fourth team in the last five seasons and has a giant chip on his shoulder—Blake.

Oddly enough, that's just what the team has lacked. "We need a guy like Jeff, some-

VERBAL COMMITMENT Blake brings a rifle arm and leadership to Arizona, but his words don't tackle or run pass routes.

ROBERT BECK



UNDER THE GUN

► Right end Kyle Vanden Bosch's season-ending tear of his left ACL on Aug. 16 means **CALVIN PACE**, a rookie left end from Wake Forest, must do the heavy lifting for a pass rush that was the NFL's worst in '02. The speedy, 269-pound Pace had just eight sacks as a senior but will still face double teams as the sole threat on a lousy front four.

one who's a bit angry, who feels like he has something to prove," says Dave McGinnis, in his third full season as the Cardinals' coach. "Everywhere he's been, he's proved he can play, and then they've decided they want someone else. Here, he's the guy. The team has taken to him, and he's been great, particularly for the young receivers."

Blake heartily endorses himself as well. "Everybody says the Cardinals are doormats," Blake says. "I've tried to show the guys that perceptions are worth nothing. It might not happen overnight, but I want to get this team fixed."

With a judiciously employed Smith running behind a talented line, at least first down shouldn't be too bad. But things could get ugly when defenses stuff eight players into the box and dare Blake to throw. New offensive coordinator Jerry Sullivan likes big-strike, multiple-receiver sets to take advantage of Blake's rifle arm, but the receiving talent isn't there. Second-round pick Anquan Boldin, a former Florida State quarterback, emerged as Blake's favorite target after having a consistent camp, but he's too slow and raw to scare defenses. Wideout Bryant Johnson, a rookie from Penn State, appeared out of his depth during camp. "Each of our wideouts has had some good days, but they haven't strung them together," Sullivan said before a mid-August practice.

Few people expect Arizona's defense to string together many good days. It's a woe-ful unit that gave up 376 yards and 26 points per game last year. Rather than take Suggs with the 10th pick in the draft, the Cardinals traded down to get Johnson in the 17th spot and Wake Forest defensive end Calvin Pace at 18, and now Arizona has to hope that Pace can be an impact pass rusher, a tall order for a rookie. The line-backing corps is average, and the secondary, though solid, will be done in by Arizona's inability to pressure the passer.

In Blake the Cardinals have found the ultimate company man, relentlessly optimistic in the face of certain disaster. Asked why things will be different in the Valley of the Sun this time, he points to his career touchdown-to-interception ratio (119 to 83) versus Plummer's (90 to 114) and his experience with untested receivers. "And I still throw the best ball in the league," he says. "It ain't no secret."

Given what he's got to work with, being delusional may serve him well. —J.E.

ENEMY LINES

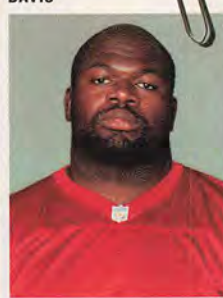
An opposing scout's view

This will be an ugly year for Arizona. The defensive line is weak. The tackles, **Wendell Bryant** and **Russell Davis**, shouldn't be starting in the NFL. Too much will be asked of **Calvin Pace**, a first-rounder most teams saw as a late second-rounder at best. . . . The Cardinals are solid at linebacker, but **Ronald McKinnon** was slipping by the end of last year. . . . They overpaid for **Dexter Jackson**, who played the game of his life for the Bucs against the Raiders in the Super Bowl. He'll be another Larry Brown, an overrated Super Bowl MVP. . . . The only bright spot will be the offensive

"They will regret letting all those receivers go, especially Boston. He was their only threat."

line—**Leonard Davis** is a beast at right guard, and **L.J. Shelton** finally looked like a player last year at left tackle. At center, **Frank Garcia** will be an upgrade over Mike Gruttadauria. . . . They will regret letting all those wide receivers go, especially David Boston. He was their only real threat on offense. Taking **Bryant Johnson** in the first round was a real reach, and he might get beaten out by some guy named **Jason McAdley**. . . . Having to watch **Emmitt Smith** every week will be sad. You'll wonder: Why did he sign with this team? . . . They're probably the worst team in pro football.

DAVIS



SCHEDULE

Sept. 7	at Detroit
14	SEATTLE
21	GREEN BAY
28	at St. Louis
Oct. 5	at Dallas
12	BALTIMORE
19	Open date
26	SAN FRANCISCO
Nov. 2	CINCINNATI
9	at Pittsburgh
16	at Cleveland
23	ST. LOUIS
30	at Chicago
Dec. 7	at San Francisco
14	CAROLINA
21	at Seattle
28	MINNESOTA

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 32
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .443
Games against playoff teams: 5

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD: 5-11

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 15/29/27
DEFENSE 30/28/29

COACH: Dave McGinnis;
fourth season with Arizona
(13-28 in NFL)

EMMITT SMITH				
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	80	254	975	3.8
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
16	89	5.6	5	

JEFF BLAKE				
POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	155	295	165	55.9
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
2,084	13	11	77.3	

JAMES HODGINS				
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	364	3	7	2.3
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
9	47	5.2	0	

BRYAN GILMORE				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	188	1	14	0

FREDDIE JONES				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	203	44	358	1

L.J. SHELTON				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 6"	335 lbs.	16	16

CAMERON SPIKES				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 2"	323 lbs.	12	5

PETE KENDALL				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 5"	288 lbs.	12	12

LEONARD DAVIS				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 6"	372 lbs.	15	15

ANTHONY CLEMENT				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 8"	328 lbs.	1	0

LARRY FOSTER				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	162	14	152	0

DEFENSE		
RE	RE	
RT	RUSSELL DAVIS	44 tackles 2 sacks
LT	WENDELL BRYANT	20 tackles 1½ sacks
LE	FRED WAKEFIELD	31 tackles 3 sacks
OLB	LEVAR FISHER	20 tackles 0 sacks
MLB	RONALD MCKINNON	108 tackles 0 sacks
OLB	RAYNOCH THOMPSON	104 tackles 3 sacks
CB	DAVID BARRETT	74 tackles 3 int.
SS	ADRIAN WILSON	93 tackles 4 int.
FS	DEXTER JACKSON	71 tackles 3 int.
CB	RENALDO HILL	56 tackles 2 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS		PVR
K	PR	
K	BILL GRAMATICA	243 29/29 XPs 15/21 FGs 74 pts.
PR	ANQUAN BOLDIN (R)	316 no punt returns in 2002
KR	KEVIN KASPER	230 32 ret. 22.6 avg. 0 TDs
P	SCOTT PLAYER	88 punts 43.9 avg.

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AFC
NORTH

1

PITTSBURGH

Steelers

With three game breakers at wide receiver, look for Tommy Maddox to go over the top

OPPONENTS SHOULD be afraid of the Steelers' passing game. Very afraid. Here's an illustration of why this unit is now the scariest on a Super Bowl-contending team. Early in camp the first-team offense, with three receivers and one back on the field, lined up against the first-team defense. Split right, 6' 5" wide receiver Plaxico Burress drew double coverage from a safety and a corner. In the slot speedy Antwaan Randle El squared off against a corner, with nickel help ready. Split left, crafty possession wideout Hines Ward had one corner on him. Tommy Maddox took the snap, and Ward sprinted 18 yards downfield, shadowed by Dewayne Washington. Two steps before Ward began his cut to the outside, Maddox threw a soft, catchable pass. The ball hung in the air, and Ward ran a precise route that left Washington lunging. After one more step Ward turned his head, and the ball was right on him. The throw could not have been more perfect, settling in Ward's breadbasket as he got both feet inbounds. "He could make that throw in his sleep, and I could catch that ball in my sleep," Ward said later.

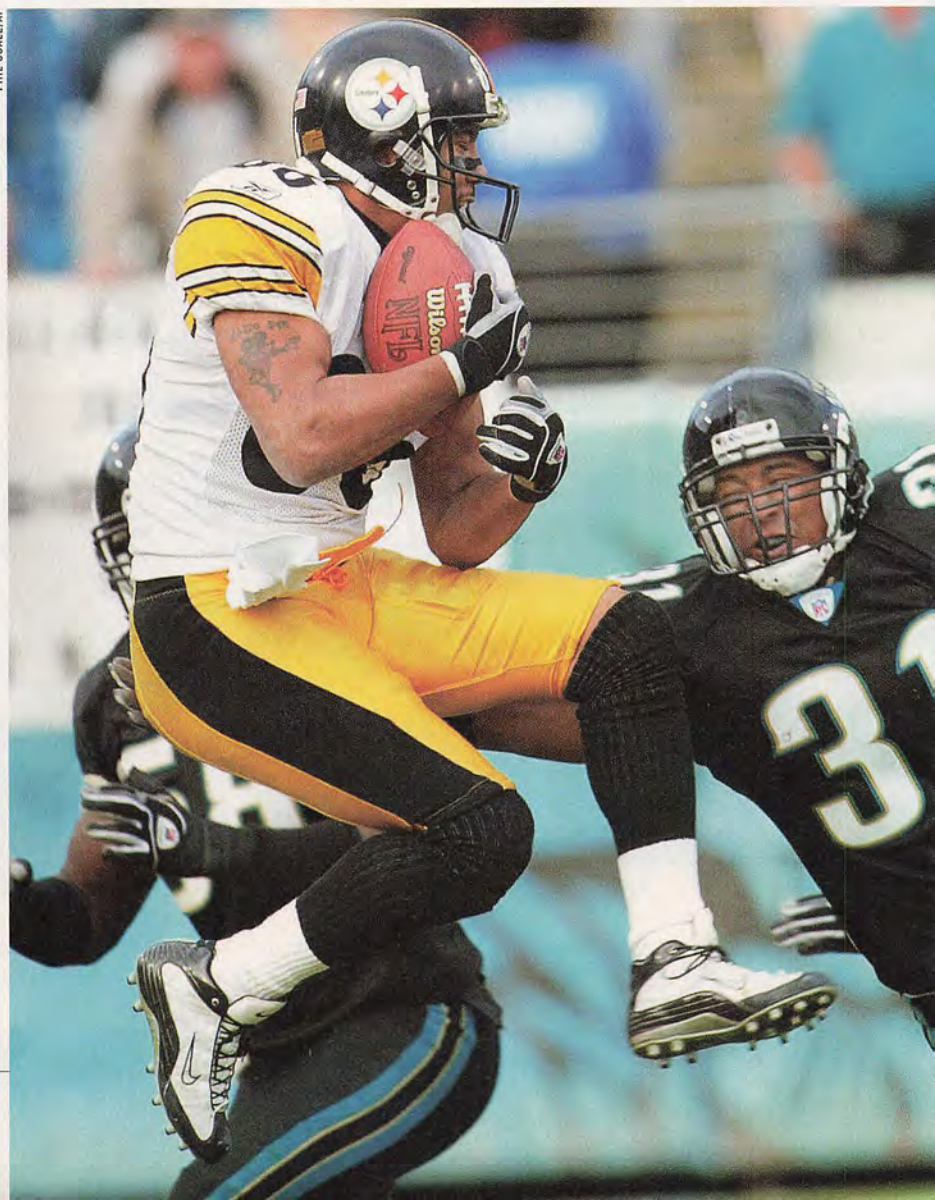
In a break from tradition Pittsburgh will try to live by the pass in 2003. That's partly because—and this will sound sacrile-

gious from Sewickley to Squirrel Hill—Ward and Burress, complemented by the emerging Randle El, are more threatening to defenses than Hall of Famers Lynn Swann and John Stallworth were in their prime. "I think it might be the hardest group of receivers in the league for a defense to match up against," coach Bill

Cowher says. "You've got the all-around ability and speed and toughness of Hines, the size and athleticism of Plaxico and a really dynamic young kid in Antwaan,

DOUBLE TROUBLE Ward is a reliable possession receiver who is also known for throwing crushing downfield blocks.

PHIL COALE/AP



UNDER THE GUN

► After 40 starts at right tackle, **MARVEL SMITH** moves to the left side, replacing Wayne Gandy, who went to the Saints in free agency. The left side is doubly important because Smith will protect the blind side of the immobile Tommy Maddox. With September games against the Ravens and the Titans, Smith will get tested early.

who's becoming a polished route runner."

Last year Ward and Burress combined for 190 catches, 2,654 yards and 19 touchdowns. In their best season together, 1979, Swann and Stallworth caught 111 passes for 1,991 yards and 13 touchdowns. Yes, the game has changed over the last 25 years, but the comparison is valid. Pittsburgh quarterbacks threw for only 159 more yards in 2002 than they did in '79.

Ward, 27, Burress, 26, and Randle El, 24, have handled all sorts of exotic defenses, including ones in which Ward and Burress were routinely double-teamed. Even when teams played overly physical, the three wideouts hung tough and avoided injuries. In eight seasons combined, Ward and Burress have missed only four games—all by Burress, when he was a rookie—because of injury.

Maddox, a pocket quarterback with a quick release, completed 62.1% of his passes last season, and that number only figures to go up with the addition of tight end Jay Riemersma, who was released by the Bills in a salary-cap move last February. The Steelers haven't had a good pass-catching tight end in years, but Riemersma, one of the game's best, gives opposing defenses one more thing to worry about.

But what really gets this team pumped about its offensive potential is the thought that it no longer has to fear having to come from behind. The players believe Maddox, who started 11 games last season, won't make the big mistake nearly as often as his predecessor, Kordell Stewart, did. (Stewart was released by Pittsburgh last February; he signed with the Bears.) "I have so much confidence in Tommy," says offensive coordinator Mike Mularkey. "He's proven himself time after time, and I'm comfortable with him in every situation."

Of course, all that won't matter if the Steelers' defense plays as poorly as it did at the end of last season. In its final three games, including two in the playoffs, Pittsburgh surrendered 31, 33 and 34 points to the Ravens, the Browns and the Titans, respectively, none of whom were offensive juggernauts. But Cowher can usually make quick repairs to his defense. And Steelers fans know that, while this team shouldn't have to score 30 points to win on Sunday, it can if it has to.

—P.K.

ENEMY LINES

An opposing scout's view

I think [running back] **Jerome Bettis** is finished. I know the off-season went well for him and he feels good now, but I don't trust his knees to stay right. That puts pressure on **Amos Zereoue**. He's going to be the starter, but he hasn't proved that he can be durable enough to be an every-down guy. . . . I like their offensive line, but I don't know if **Oliver Ross** is quick enough to handle the right-tackle spot for 16 games. . . . They made a great pickup in **Jay Riemersma**. I look for them to play more two-tight-end sets with one back, with Riemersma as the receiving tight end and **Mark**

"Bell is one of the few inside linebackers in the league who can be a scary pass rusher."

Bruener as the blocker. . . . The biggest question with those great wide receivers is whether **Tommy Maddox** can do it for a full season. He looked great last year, but that's still a huge question. . . . On defense, **Kendrell Bell** coming back healthy should make all the difference to the pass rush. He's one of the few inside linebackers in the league who can be a scary pass rusher. . . . The drafting of [safety] **Troy Polamalu** was brilliant for that defense because the secondary is so average. His physical play should make receivers nervous when they go over the middle.

RIEMERSMA



SCHEDULE

Sept. 7	BALTIMORE
14	at Kansas City
21	at Cincinnati
28	TENNESSEE
Oct. 5	CLEVELAND
12	at Denver
19	Open date
26	ST. LOUIS
Nov. 2	at Seattle
9	ARIZONA
17	at San Francisco (Mon.)
23	at Cleveland
30	CINCINNATI
Dec. 7	OAKLAND
14	at N.Y. Jets
21	SAN DIEGO
28	at Baltimore

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 26
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .473
Games against playoff teams: 6

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD: 10-5-1

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 9/7/5
DEFENSE 1/20/7

COACH: Bill Cowher; 12th season with Pittsburgh (109-66-1 in NFL)

AMOS ZEREQUE				
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	43	193	762	3.9
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
42	341	8.1	4	

TOMMY MADDOX				
POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	46	377	234	62.1
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
2,836	20	16	85.2	

DAN KREIDER				
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	367	6	16	2.7
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
18	122	6.8	1	

HINES WARD				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	23	112	1,329	12

JAY RIEMERSMA				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	210	32	350	0

MARVEL SMITH				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 5"	308 lbs.	16	16

ALAN FANECA				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 5"	305 lbs.	16	16

JEFF HARTINGS				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 3"	295 lbs.	12	11

KENDALL SIMMONS				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 3"	313 lbs.	14	14

OLIVER ROSS				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 5"	309 lbs.	16	1

PLAXICO BURRESS				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	39	78	1,325	7

DEFENSE

RE	KIMO VON OELHOFFEN	22 tackles	3 sacks
NT	CASEY HAMPTON	41 tackles	2 sacks
LE	AARON SMITH	70 tackles	5½ sacks
OLB	JOEY PORTER	89 tackles	9 sacks
ILB	KENDRELL BELL	50 tackles	4 sacks
ILB	JAMES FARRIOR	77 tackles	0 sacks
OLB	JASON GILDON	67 tackles	9 sacks
CB	DEWAYNE WASHINGTON	54 tackles	3 int.
SS	MIKE LOGAN	36 tackles	1 int.
FS	BRENT ALEXANDER	75 tackles	4 int.
CB	CHAD SCOTT	81 tackles	2 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS

	PVR				
K	JEFF REED	282	10/11 XPs	17/19 FGs	61 pts.
PR	ANTWAAN RANDLE EL	184	37 ret.	6.9 avg.	0 TDs
KR	ANTWAAN RANDLE EL	184	32 ret.	22.9 avg.	1 TD
P	JOSH MILLER		55 punts	41.2 avg.	

New acquisition PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 89)

AFC
NORTH

2

CLEVELAND

Browns

Butch Davis starts over at linebacker, throwing three second-year players into the lineup

NOW THAT the quarterback controversy has been settled, with Kelly Holcomb winning the starting job, it's time to answer another important question regarding Cleveland's prospects this season: Who in the world are those new starting linebackers, and can they play?

Early in the off-season Browns coach and defensive architect Butch Davis cut last year's starters—Darren Hambrick, Earl Holmes and Dwayne Rudd—plus rehabbing pass-rush linebacker Jamir Miller. In their place he penciled in three 2002 second-day draft picks: Kevin Bentley (fourth round) and Ben Taylor (fourth) on the outside with Andra Davis (fifth) in the middle. None of the three have started an NFL game. Which leads to yet another important question: Coach, have you gone mad?

"I knew the purge was coming, I just didn't know it would be this soon," says Butch Davis. "Then I saw how we played at linebacker last year. Our starters were a nonfactor on special teams, and we needed more speed and versatility at the position. Did you know that our starting linebackers totaled one sack and one interception last year?"

Holmes is a great run-stuffer, but how effective could he have been if Cleveland ranked 27th in rushing defense last year?

UNDER THE GUN

► The team's first-round draft pick in 2002, running back **WILLIAM GREEN** looked like a flop through his first nine games: 161 yards, 2.3 per carry. But over the last seven games, he ran for 726 yards and averaged 4.2 per rush. With the uncertainty surrounding the defense, Green needs to play with the confidence he had in the second half.

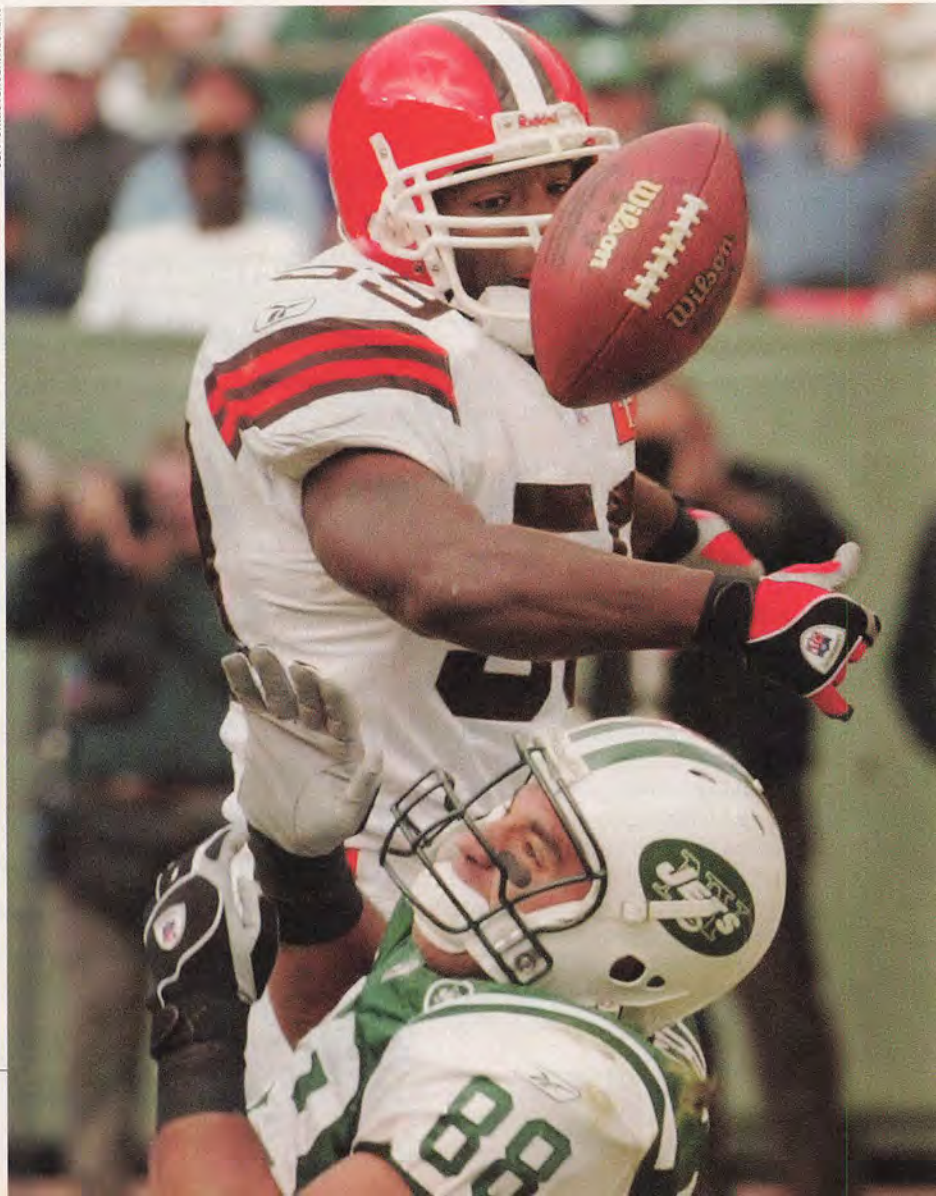
Plus, the NFL game now requires more speed at the linebacker spots than ever before. Until this season Philadelphia, for example, favored huge middle linebackers in its scheme; the Eagles signed a quick, small Falcons backup, Mark Simoneau, to be their defensive quarterback this season. Similarly, Butch Davis

and his new defensive coordinator, Dave Campo, have embraced speed and youth at all three linebacker slots.

Of the three, Bentley got the most play-

THE FUTURE IS NOW Bentley (below), Davis and Taylor provide the speed and versatility needed by the Browns' defense.

JEFF CHRISTENSEN/REUTERS



ing time in the regular defense last year. Taylor, the defensive leader at Virginia Tech for three years, played well early in camp. Andra Davis is a technically sound player with more quickness than his 255 pounds would suggest; he had 24 tackles for a loss in three seasons at Florida. "I understand why people are wondering about us," he says. "None of us have been battle-tested, but we know we can play. Why not put us out there now and let us grow?"

"In our scheme," says Taylor, "the defensive line keeps the offensive line off the linebackers. We're supposed to be the playmakers. Coach Campo is on us every day, telling us there are no excuses. No one cares that we haven't played before. We know we have to get it done now."

The new linebackers will be challenged early: Cleveland plays four explosive offenses—Indianapolis, San Francisco, Pittsburgh and Oakland—in its first six games. Yet it's hard to predict how they will perform when there are also questions about the effectiveness of the front four. In making defensive end Courtney Brown the No. 1 pick in the 2000 draft and Gerard Warren the No. 3 pick in '01, the Browns expected to have a dynamic pass-rushing duo by now. Instead, Brown and Warren have a combined 18 sacks in 63 career games. Brown is recovering from risky microfracture surgery last December (a hole was drilled in his left knee to stimulate the growth of cartilage that would cut down on bone-on-bone contact in the joint), and he says he'll be ready opening week. He missed the first two preseason games, however, because he felt that the knee wasn't in game shape. With the exception of brief flashes of dominance in the last month of his rookie year, Warren's tenure has been marked by an alarming lack of productivity. Never was that more evident than this preseason; he had zero tackles in the first three preseason games.

The new linebackers will have their hands full in September whether Brown and Warren are on their games or not. "I hope the young bucks can step it up," says Warren. "We need them. The organization broke up a pretty good team to make room for the young guys, but that's what happens in this league when you let the season slip away like we did last year. Change happens."

—P.K.

ENEMY LINES

An opposing scout's view

“You could tell last season that **Kelly Holcomb** is the better quarterback and that **Tim Couch** has some holes. Holcomb's a natural leader; Couch always looks as if there's something holding him back. . . . I like their receiver depth, but I'd play **Andre' Davis** more. He's a star waiting to happen, and he and **Dennis Northcutt** are deep threats the Browns should be using to stretch the defense. . . . **Butch Davis** overrates **Jeff Faine**—and you're going to have some mistakes from a rookie. Their whole line is like **Shaun O'Hara**: tough as nails but limited strengthwise and

“Their offensive line is tough as nails but limited strengthwise and athletically.”

athletically. . . . On defense **Gerard Warren's** been stealing money for two years. He should be so much better collapsing the line. With his degenerative knee, **Courtney Brown** could be out of the league within a year. . . . I loved **Ben Taylor** coming out of Virginia Tech, and I love Butch's move to play his young linebackers. Why not? The old guys didn't fit his scheme. . . . They'll have the best special teams in the division. **Chris Crocker** [a rookie defensive back from Marshall] will be one of the best special teams players in the league by November.

ANDRE' DAVIS



SCHEDULE

Sept. 7	INDIANAPOLIS
14	at Baltimore
21	at San Francisco
28	CINCINNATI
Oct. 5	at Pittsburgh
12	OAKLAND
19	SAN DIEGO
26	at New England
Nov. 2	Open date
9	at Kansas City
16	ARIZONA
23	PITTSBURGH
30	at Seattle
Dec. 8	ST. LOUIS (Mon.)
14	at Denver
21	BALTIMORE
28	at Cincinnati

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 22
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .480
Games against playoff teams: 5

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD: 9-7

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 23/18/23

DEFENSE 27/15/21

COACH: Butch Davis; third season with Cleveland (16-16 in NFL)

WILLIAM GREEN				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
RB	55	243	887	3.7
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
16	113	7.1	6	

KELLY HOLCOMB				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
QB	78	106	64	60.4
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
790	8	4	92.9	

AARON SHEA				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
H-B	279	7	49	0

KEVIN JOHNSON				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	112	67	703	4

STEVE HEIDEN				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	310	17	105	1

ROSS VERBA				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 4"	308 lbs.	16	16

BARRY STOKES				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 4"	310 lbs.	16	16

JEFF FAINE (R)				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 3"	303 lbs.	13	13

SHAUN O'HARA				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 3"	306 lbs.	16	16

RYAN TUCKER				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 5"	305 lbs.	14	14

QUINCY MORGAN				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	81	56	964	7

DEFENSE

RE	COURTNEY BROWN	42 tackles	2 sacks
RT	ORPHEUS ROYE	55 tackles	1/2 sack
LT	GERARD WARREN	40 tackles	2 sacks
LE	KENARD LANG	46 tackles	5 1/2 sacks
OLB	KEVIN BENTLEY	34 tackles	0 sacks
MLB	ANDRA DAVIS	5 tackles	1 int.
OLB	BEN TAYLOR	3 tackles	0 sacks
CB	DAYLON MCCUTCHEON	42 tackles	1 int.
SS	ROBERT GRIFFITH	73 tackles	3 int.
FS	EARL LITTLE	61 tackles	4 int.
CB	ANTHONY HENRY	62 tackles	2 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS PVR

K	PHIL DAWSON	221	34/35 XPs	22/28 FGs	100 pts.
PR	DENNIS NORTHCHUTT	163	25 ret.	14.7 avg.	2 TDs
KR	ANDRE' DAVIS	133	50 ret.	21.4 avg.	1 TD
P	CHRIS GARDOCKI	81	punts	41.8 avg.	

AFC
NORTH

3

BALTIMORE

Ravens

A healthy Ray Lewis and the best pass rusher in the draft give a good defense scary potential

TWO STORIES illustrate the kind of influence inside linebacker Ray Lewis exerts on the Ravens, a team that he's trying to drag back into playoff contention:

On the morning of Aug. 18, the second-to-last day of the Ravens' training camp at McDaniel College in central Maryland, Lewis addressed his teammates and told them not to drive back to the locker room after practice as they usually do in the golf carts provided for them. Instead, he told them to walk the gantlet of fans who'd come to watch them work out, and autograph everything in sight. So 86 players, from Bennie Anderson to Dave Zastudil, spent up to 45 minutes signing on their long walk back to the showers.

Two days earlier, when the Ravens played their second preseason game, at Atlanta, cornerback Corey Fuller, a free-agent pickup who had been released by the Browns, watched in amazement as seven or eight defenders swarmed in on every tackle, whether it was on a running play up the middle or a pass play 15 yards downfield. When Fuller allowed a long completion, his heart sank. But when he returned to the huddle, Fuller heard a defensive lineman say, "Our fault. We gotta get more pressure." And Lewis fixed him with his crazed look and yelled, "Just

know I'm coming! You got help from me!" Fuller thought the intensity level felt more like the playoffs than the preseason.

"Ray plays so hard that all these players on defense don't want to let him down," Fuller says. "They're more worried about facing him if they screw up than facing any coach."

In the Ravens' Super Bowl season of 2000, Lewis was a team leader, but veterans like Sam Adams and Rod Woodson and Tony Siragusa didn't need anybody to

PASSION PLAY The joy and intensity that Lewis exhibits on the field—and off—makes his teammates play better.

UNDER THE GUN

► The Browns let **COREY FULLER** go because they thought he was too slow, but coach Brian Billick is counting on the cornerback's swagger and savvy to make up for any loss of speed. Fuller joins a team desperate for a cover corner to pair with Chris McAlister—last year, the Ravens allowed foes to complete 62.8% of their passes.

DOUG PENSINGER/GETTY IMAGES



lead them. In 2003, with only six of the 22 starters from that team left, Lewis's grip is unchallenged. In part it's because of the magnetism of his personality. That's always been there, but now there's more glee in Lewis because he's fired up to play again after separating his left shoulder last fall and missing 11 of 16 games. "He's back in the toy store," coach Brian Billick says, "happier than ever."

"When you play with a separated shoulder," Lewis said after one practice, "you're not you. Just before I went in for surgery, I told my mother, 'When I wake up I'm gonna be a new man.' And that's how I feel. I can't wait to go out there every day. Fuller said to me one day in practice, 'Now I see why this team plays so well. They feed off your energy.'"

There's a lot to that. Look at the free agents who've left the Ravens. Cornerback Duane Starks had a pedestrian first year in Arizona. The Broncos have defensive tackle Lionel Dalton on the trading block. Seen any Sunday night highlights of Houston linebacker Jamie Sharper? "The players who've left here aren't as successful as they were here," says minority owner Steve Bisciotti. "I think Ray gets the people around him to play 30 percent better than they are."

Lewis says his passion is what makes his teammates play better. That and getting them to put in the time. "In 2000 we had Hall of Famers," he says. "What can I tell Rod Woodson? But now we have a bunch of young guys who want to be great. I stress learning from film, doing the extra things. At the end of practice I say, 'If you stop your preparation here, you lose. We lose.'"

Lewis will play next to 250-pound plugger Edgerton Hartwell in the Ravens' 3-4 defense, freeing Lewis to range from sideline to sideline. Ends Adalius Thomas and Anthony Weaver combined for only 6½ sacks last year, but they should be more productive with Lewis back—and with the addition of the 10th pick in the draft, Arizona State outside linebacker Terrell Suggs, whose stock slumped last spring because of a lousy 40-yard dash time. Euphoric to get Suggs, who had 24 sacks last fall, Billick laughs about his 40. "I'll worry about that," he says, "when they line the quarterback up 40 yards back from center."

The Ravens got the best pass rusher in the draft and now have a rebuilt Lewis. A pretty good defense might get downright scary.

"Their offensive line scares me. To me, it's Jonathan Ogden and four schmoes."

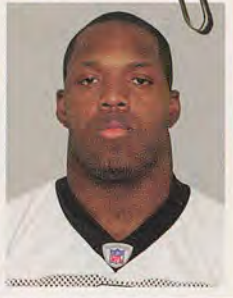
line scares me. To me, it's **Jonathan Ogden** and four schmoes. **Ed Mulitalo**'s overrated, and how long can **Orlando Brown** last, coming back after three years? ... I love **Todd Heap**'s ability to get open and run after the catch, but I don't trust any of their wide-outs. **Frank Sanders** has always been more hype than production, and **Travis Taylor** is one of those classic Florida receivers—never as explosive as you thought when you drafted him. ... **Matt Stover**'s the most reliable kicker in the division. ... This team is a mystery because of its quarterback, but I think it has a chance to be really good.

ENEMY LINES

An opposing scout's view

I like their 3-4 defense, with **Terrell Suggs** and **Peter Boulware** on the sides and **Ray Lewis** in the middle. Suggs will be a monster; I just don't know if it'll be this year. ... **Corey Fuller** will be a weak link at corner. ... They have a very average defensive line. **Kelly Gregg** can get pushed around. ... You can tell **Brian Billick** doesn't like **Chris Redman** at quarterback; he's just not accurate enough. But that was [rookie] **Kyle Boller**'s weakness at Cal. ... **Jamal Lewis** could rush for 1,600 yards. He's a bullish back who can get around the corner quicker than you think. ... Their offensive

SUGGS



SCHEDULE

Sept. 7	at Pittsburgh
14	CLEVELAND
21	at San Diego
28	KANSAS CITY
Oct. 5	Open date
12	at Arizona
19	at Cincinnati
26	DENVER
Nov. 2	JACKSONVILLE
9	at St. Louis
16	at Miami
23	SEATTLE
30	SAN FRANCISCO
Dec. 7	CINCINNATI
14	at Oakland
21	at Cleveland
28	PITTSBURGH

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 21
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .480
Games against playoff teams: 6

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD: 7-9

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 16/27/26
DEFENSE 13/26/22

COACH: Brian Billick; fifth season with Baltimore (37-27 in NFL)

JAMAL LEWIS

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
RB	29	308	1,327	4.3
REC	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
47	442	9.4	7	

CHRIS REDMAN

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	130	182	97	53.3
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
1,034	7	3	76.1	

ALAN RICARD

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
FB	390	14	58	4.1
REC	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
10	60	6.0	2	

TRAVIS TAYLOR

POS.	PVR	REC	YARDS	TDs
WR	71	61	869	6

TODD HEAP

POS.	PVR	REC	YARDS	TDs
TE	79	68	836	6

JONATHAN OGDEN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	QMS	STARTS
LT	6' 9"	340 lbs.	16	16

EDWIN MULITALO

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	QMS	STARTS
LG	6' 3"	340 lbs.	16	15

MIKE FLYNN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	QMS	STARTS
C	6' 3"	305 lbs.	15	15

BENNIE ANDERSON

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	QMS	STARTS
RG	6' 5"	335 lbs.	16	16

ORLANDO BROWN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	QMS	STARTS
RT	6' 7"	350 lbs.	0	0

FRANK SANDERS

POS.	PVR	REC	YARDS	TDs
WR	197	34	400	2

DEFENSE

RE	ADALIUS THOMAS	41 tackles	3 sacks
NT	KELLY GREGG	56 tackles	2 sacks
LE	ANTHONY WEAVER	31 tackles	3½ sacks
OLB	PETER BOULWARE	73 tackles	7 sacks
ILB	EDGERTON HARTWELL	144 tackles	3 sacks
ILB	RAY LEWIS	58 tackles	2 int.
OLB	TERRELL SUGGS (R)	73 tackles	24 sacks
CB	COREY FULLER	32 tackles	1 int.
SS	ED REED	80 tackles	5 int.
FS	GARY BAXTER	78 tackles	1 int.
CB	CHRIS MCALISTER	53 tackles	1 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS PVR

K	MATT STOVER	238	33/33 XPs	21/25 FGs	96 pts.
PR	LAMONT BRIGHTFUL	437	15 ret.	16.1 avg.	1 TD
KR	LAMONT BRIGHTFUL	437	34 ret.	20.6 avg.	0 TDs
P	DAVE ZASTUDIL	81	punts	41.6 avg.	

New acquisition (R) Rookie (statistics for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page B9)

AFC
NORTH

4

CINCINNATI

Bengals

With Marvin Lewis calling the shots, the NFL's longest-suffering fans have reason for hope

NEW BENGALS coach Marvin Lewis is the first man other than team founder Paul Brown and his relatives to have the authority to make personnel decisions. So it should come as no surprise that Lewis is also the first man to bring hope to this moribund franchise since wacky Sam Wyche was driving game officials, women's groups and the NFL commissioner crazy as Cincinnati's coach in the late 1980s.

The air of optimism is the biggest change around these parts. Ask any of the Bengals. Ask any Cincinnati fan who has had to endure a league-high 12 straight seasons without a winning record. "When I'd run into fans in the off-season," guard Matt O'Dwyer says, "the first thing they'd always ask me is, 'Is Mike Brown really giving up power?'" Brown, the Club president and one of Paul's three sons, is good-hearted, but since becoming the franchise's football architect following his father's death in 1991, he has graded out as an F. Though Brown hasn't ceded total control to Lewis, he allowed the new coach to pursue the free agents and draft the players he wanted.

Lewis, the respected longtime defensive coordinator, also cut loose nine of the team's 15 assistant coaches, including for-

mer Bengals stars Ken Anderson and Tim Krumrie. He nudged old-school strength coach Kim Wood, in the job for 28 years, into retirement and oversaw a \$250,000 upgrade of the weight room. He emphasized speed training and the importance of proper diet. He refused to beg the team's best defensive player, linebacker Takeo

Spikes, to return, letting him go to Buffalo in free agency. He tried to convince free agents from other teams that Cincinnati wasn't Siberia, and good players such as

NEW ATTITUDE Kitna says he sees a confidence in the players that didn't exist during his first two years as a Bengal.



UNDER THE GUN

► The fourth pick in the 2000 draft, **PETER WARRICK** has been a disappointment, with one 100-yard receiving game. The Bengals need a second receiver to pair with Chad Johnson, and observers say Warrick has been reborn under coach Marvin Lewis. Maybe the drafting of Tennessee's Kelley Washington got Warrick's attention.

ENEMY LINES

An opposing scout's view

linebacker Kevin Hardy, defensive tackle John Thornton and cornerback Tory James picked the Bengals over better teams.

One of Paul Brown's beliefs was that players should use the off-season to prepare for life after football, meaning the Bengals had never stressed the off-season strength and conditioning program. That was O.K. a generation ago, when few players worked out hard from March through June, but times have changed. So Lewis implemented the same voluntary (read: mandatory) off-season regimen that is now standard around the league. At least 45 players were regular participants in the 14-week program. "So many guys came," says wideout Peter Warrick, "that we had to split into groups and come at assigned times. The weight room got too crowded."

"Marvin is in total control," says quarterback Jon Kitna, "and whatever the situation was before, the players knew Dick LeBeau [Lewis's predecessor] didn't have that control. I don't care what anyone says: If the players don't have faith in who has control, you're not going to succeed. And I can tell through one off-season and training camp with Marvin, the attitude is 100 percent better. The players think they can win."

More important, the players think they are being given every opportunity to succeed. "Marvin stresses so many little things because he says little things lose games," says O'Dwyer. "That reminds me of what Bill Parcells used to say when I was with the Jets. Both guys want you to be accountable for everything."

Lewis has looked for every edge he can find. He was adamant about traveling to the team's three regular-season games out West—against the Raiders, Cardinals and Chargers—on the Friday before the game instead of on Saturday. Brown originally thought it was a waste of time and money, but he came around to Lewis's way of thinking. "Over the years I've found that when you take the West Coast trips, or you go to Florida, family comes out of the woodwork," he says. "I wanted to go out on Friday night and Saturday morning, then have the hotel become the safe haven for players about noon on Saturday. Mike was willing to change. So far this job is everything people said it wasn't. Mike's been flexible."

Indeed, things are looking up for the Bengals. —P.K.

FF You can't underestimate the impact of a coaching and philosophy change. Carolina won games last year because of John Fox's presence and his demands. The same thing will happen here with **Marvin Lewis**. . . . The only thing I can't figure out is why they let their best defensive player go—and got nothing for him. If they had put the franchise tag on [free agent] Takeo Spikes, they could have worked a trade and gotten something for him. To think that **Kevin Hardy** is going to be a good replacement for Spikes, with Hardy's injury history, is ridiculous. . . . I like the potential of **Justin Smith** as a pass

"The Thornton acquisition was one of the most underrated moves of the off-season."

rusher, and the **John Thornton** acquisition was one of the most underrated moves of the off-season. He's strong against the run and the pass. . . . The secondary is weak, and it won't be fixed by **Tory James**. He's poor in man coverage. . . . On offense the Bengals have two excellent players: **Corey Dillon**, who could play for me any day, and **Chad Johnson**, a bona fide Number 1 receiver. He's got a big mouth, but he produces. He's sneaky fast. . . . **Jon Kitna** [messes up] just enough to get you beat. . . . The line looks leaky to me, but I love **Eric Steinbach**. He'll be a solid guard for 10 years.

SMITH



SCHEDULE

Sept. 7	DENVER
14	at Oakland
21	PITTSBURGH
28	at Cleveland
Oct. 5	at Buffalo
12	Open date
19	BALTIMORE
26	SEATTLE
Nov. 2	at Arizona
9	HOUSTON
16	KANSAS CITY
23	at San Diego
30	at Pittsburgh
Dec. 7	at Baltimore
14	SAN FRANCISCO
21	at St. Louis
28	CLEVELAND

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 16
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .508
Games against playoff teams: 6

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD: 2-14

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 21/13/18
DEFENSE 22/13/17

COACH: Marvin Lewis; first season with Cincinnati (0-0 in NFL)

COREY DILLON

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	17	314	1,311	4.2
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
43	298	6.9	7	

JON KITNA

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	89	473	294	62.2
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
3,178	16	16	79.1	

CHAD JOHNSON

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	50	69	1,166	5

REGGIE KELLY

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	235	14	162	0

LEVI JONES

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 5"	310 lbs.	16	14

ERIC STEINBACH (R)

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 6"	297 lbs.	13	13

MIKE GOFF

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 5"	311 lbs.	13	13

MATT O'DWYER

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 5"	305 lbs.	16	16

WILLIE ANDERSON

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 5"	340 lbs.	16	16

KELLEY WASHINGTON (R)

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	170	23	443	1

PETER WARRICK

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	157	53	606	6

DEFENSE

RE	CARL POWELL	31 tackles	3 sacks
RT	JOHN THORNTON	20 tackles	2 sacks
LT	TONY WILLIAMS	42 tackles	5 sacks
LE	JUSTIN SMITH	61 tackles	6½ sacks
OLB	ADRIAN ROSS	20 tackles	0 sacks
MLB	KEVIN HARDY	75 tackles	2 sacks
OLB	BRIAN SIMMONS	86 tackles	3 sacks
CB	TORY JAMES	45 tackles	4 int.
SS	MARQUAND MANUEL	34 tackles	0 int.
FS	MARK ROMAN	30 tackles	0 int.
CB	JEFF BURRIS	62 tackles	1 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS PVR

K	NEIL RACKERS	273	30/32 XPs	15/18 FGs	75 pts.
PR	PETER WARRICK	157	4 ret.	3.5 avg.	0 TDs
KR	BRANDON BENNETT	299	49 ret.	25.1 avg.	1 TD
P	NICK HARRIS		65 punts	40.1 avg.	

New acquisition (R) Rookie (statistics for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 89)

AFC
SOUTH

1

TENNESSEE

Titans

With Jevon Kearse finally healthy, the defense is ready to, once again, get its freak on

LIKE MOST athletes dealing with their first significant injury, defensive end Jevon Kearse didn't handle his well. He says he went into a deep funk last season while waiting for his surgically repaired left foot to heal. He sulked. He wouldn't talk about the injury with his relatives. And he spent far too much time thinking about his life, pondering what he might do when his career ended, which only made matters worse. He couldn't think of a single option.

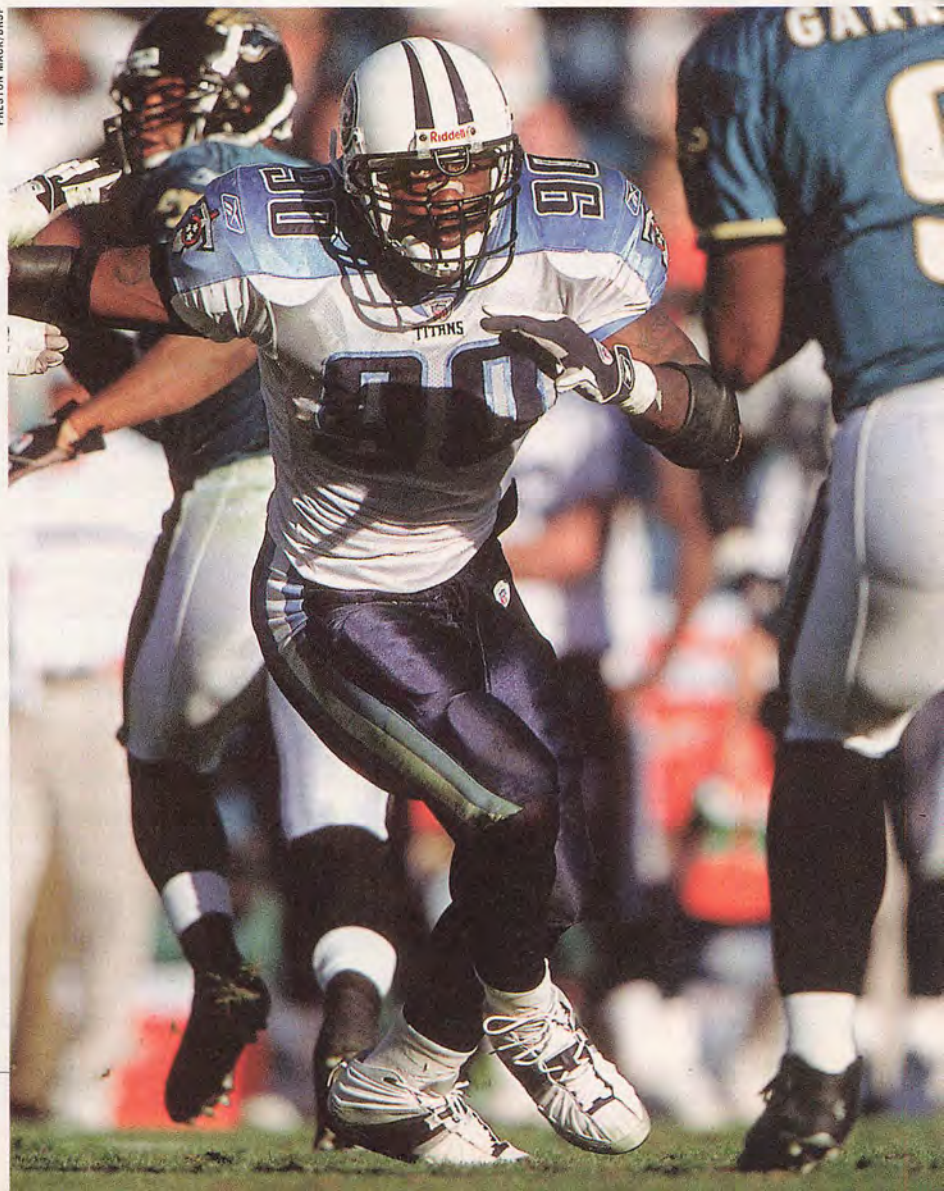
The Freak is a different man today. He smiles easily, jokes often and generally thinks pleasant thoughts, often about returning to work with a defensive line that includes a Pro Bowl end (Kevin Carter), a monstrous tackle (Albert Haynesworth) and a second-year end who tallied eight sacks in Kearse's absence (Carlos Hall). "When I watched those guys play together last year," says Kearse, a three-time Pro Bowler, "I had one thought: What would it be like if I was out there and healthy?"

Tennessee can't wait to find out. A fracture of the fifth metatarsal in Kearse's left foot limited him to the season opener and the last three regular-season games, but the Titans finished 11-5 and won the AFC South. Now they can look forward to having Kearse back at full power, though he was slowed in training camp by a right

ankle sprain. He first underwent surgery last September—doctors put a screw in the broken bone—but the foot didn't heal properly. Constant soreness late in the season forced him back to the operating table on Feb. 13 for bone-graft surgery. That seemed to do the trick. At the start of training camp Kearse said, "I already feel 100 percent bet-

ter than I did at any time last season." When asked if anything should be read into the coaches' limiting him to one practice during the first week of two-a-days, Kearse

A CURSE LIFTED After a frustrating rehab, Kearse is back doing what he does best: terrifying quarterbacks.



UNDER THE GUN

► Because he's a breakaway threat, running back **ROBERT HOLCOMBE** is better suited to the Titans' wide-open offense than Eddie George. A hip injury limited Holcombe to eight games last year, but he still averaged 5.1 yards on 47 carries. With George's durability in question, Holcombe needs to make the most of whatever opportunities he gets.

said, "Trust me, if we had a game tomorrow, I'd be able to play the whole way."

If Kearsse returns to top form—he averaged 12 sacks during his first three seasons—the Titans' defense should be even better than last season's unit, which ranked 10th in the league. His presence was undeniable when he came back last December. Tennessee surrendered a total of 20 points. "It was amazing how much faster quarterbacks were getting rid of the ball when Jevon was in the game," says defensive coordinator Jim Schwartz.

Adds coach Jeff Fisher, "Jevon dictates protection schemes. When he wasn't in there, we didn't have that rare speed coming off the edge."

The 6'5", 290-pound Carter certainly will benefit from Kearsse's return. Carter had 10 sacks in 2002 despite facing constant double teams. The Titans have little depth at defensive tackle—Haynesworth and Robaire Smith will play most of the snaps—but Schwartz already plans to move Carter to tackle on passing downs. That would give Tennessee a line of Kearsse, Carter, Haynesworth and Hall, a look the Titans used late last season. "The coaches will be able to juggle us all to create the best matchups," Kearsse says. "We're going to have a lot of playmakers up front."

That's not the only place Tennessee will have playmakers. Samari Rolle is an excellent shutdown cornerback, and he has two ferocious hitters behind him in safeties Lance Schulters and Tank Williams. The linebacking corps features a pair of young stars on the outside. Peter Sirmon was so productive in his first year as a starter that St. Louis tried to sign him as a restricted free agent during the off-season. Keith Bulluck, who led the team in tackles last season, is telling his teammates to play with the same sense of urgency that they displayed in rebounding from a 1-4 start last year. "We started in a ditch and climbed all the way out," Bulluck says. "We called ourselves the Tyrants because we had to bully our way to the top. We still have to think of ourselves as underdogs."

Opponents will have trouble thinking of them that way. With Kearsse bolstering the defense and ever-dangerous quarterback Steve McNair directing the offense, the Titans will be among the favorites for the AFC title. "With all the guys we have coming back," Kearsse says, "we're going to be scary."

"Derrick Mason has quickness and good hands, but he doesn't have great deep speed."

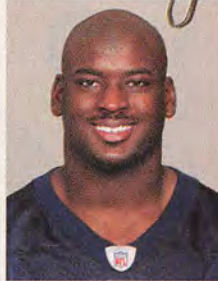
ENEMY LINES

An opposing scout's view

Steve McNair is obviously their MVP. He has a cannon, and he understands the game better. He's not trying to run as often, and when he does scramble, he's looking to make a play downfield. The big question is, Will he stay healthy? ... **Eddie George** isn't as dominant as he used to be. When you're a punishing runner and you carry the ball as much as he has, you tend to decline pretty fast. ... They really don't have impressive talent at receiver. **Frank Wycheck** is getting old. **Derrick Mason** has quickness and good hands, but he doesn't have great deep speed. ...

Benji Olson and **Zach Piller** are as tough as nails. They aren't very mobile, but they're superaggressive at the point of attack. ... I think their lack of depth at defensive tackle will be an issue. They have to hope **Albert Haynesworth** can hold up while playing more snaps. ... I like the young safety **Tank Williams**. They have a very complicated system, and they rely on their safeties to make a lot of adjustments. He picked it up pretty fast. ... This team will be good as long as the starters stay healthy. If the Titans have to rely on too many second-line guys, they're in trouble.

WILLIAMS



SCHEDULE

Sept. 7	OAKLAND
14	at Indianapolis
21	NEW ORLEANS
28	at Pittsburgh
Oct. 5	at New England
12	HOUSTON
19	at Carolina
26	at Jacksonville
Nov. 2	Open date
9	MIAMI
16	JACKSONVILLE
23	at Atlanta
Dec. 1	at N.Y. Jets (Mon.)
7	INDIANAPOLIS
14	BUFFALO
21	at Houston
28	TAMPA BAY

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 9
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .523
Games against playoff teams: 7

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD: 11-5

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 11/20/17
DEFENSE 2/25/10

COACH: Jeff Fisher, 10th season with Tennessee (76-58 in NFL)

EDDIE GEORGE					
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.	
RB	25	343	1,165	3.4	
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs		
36	255	7.1	14		

STEVE MCNAIR					
POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%	
QB	41	492	301	61.2	
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING		
3,387	22	15	84.0		

GREG COMELLA					
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.	
FB	394	1	0	—	
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs		
10	70	7.0	0		

DERRICK MASON					
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs	
WR	67	79	1,012	5	

FRANK WYCHECK					
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs	
TE	141	40	346	2	

BRAD HOPKINS					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
LT	6' 3"	305 lbs.	14	14	

ZACH PILLER					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
LG	6' 5"	315 lbs.	13	13	

JUSTIN HARTWIG					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
C	6' 4"	300 lbs.	3	0	

BENJI OLSON					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
RG	6' 4"	315 lbs.	16	16	

FRED MILLER					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
RT	6' 7"	315 lbs.	16	16	

DREW BENNETT					
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs	
WR	192	33	478	2	

DEFENSE			
RE	JEVON KEARSE	4 tackles	2 sacks
RT	ALBERT HAYNESWORTH	30 tackles	1 sack
LT	ROBAIRE SMITH	34 tackles	2½ sacks
LE	KEVIN CARTER	42 tackles	10 sacks
OLB	KEITH BULLUCK	127 tackles	1 sack
MLB	BRAD KASELL	0 tackles	0 sacks
OLB	PETER SIRMON	93 tackles	2 sacks
CB	SAMARI ROLLE	48 tackles	2 int.
SS	TANK WILLIAMS	61 tackles	1 int.
FS	LANCE SCHULTERS	84 tackles	6 int.
CB	ANDRE DYSON	61 tackles	3 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS			
	PVR		
K	JOE NEDNEY	212	36/36 XPs 25/31 FGs 111 pts.
PR	DERRICK MASON	67	9 ret. 6.7 avg. 0 TDs
KR	JUSTIN MCCAREINS	285	13 ret. 23.1 avg. 0 TDs
P	CRAIG HENTRICH		65 punts 41.9 avg.

PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 89)

AFC
SOUTH

2

INDIANAPOLIS Colts

It's time for the defense, led by promising
linebacker David Thornton, to make a stand

LINEBACKER DAVID THORNTON was the talk of the town whenever he returned home to Goldsboro, N.C., during the off-season. Friends chatted about planning trips to attend his games. Others had already placed orders to receive NFL Ticket on DirecTV. Even Thornton's onetime doubters lined up to compliment him: A high school coach who had tried to dissuade him from walking on at North Carolina talked of how Thornton embodies the fruits of hard work and diligence.

The Colts are just as excited to see how Thornton responds in his first season as a starter. As the weakside linebacker in coach Tony Dungy's cover-two scheme, Thornton will be freed up to track the ball from sideline to sideline. Mike Peterson thrived at the position last season, leading Indianapolis with 136 tackles and three interceptions, but he left for the Jaguars as a free agent. For the Indianapolis defense to succeed, Thornton has to have the same kind of impact.

On appearance alone the 6' 2", 230-pound Thornton appears up to the task. He possesses exceptional quickness and range, which is why the Colts didn't fight to keep Peterson. A fourth-round draft pick in 2002, Thornton spent his rookie season playing on special teams and in

nickel situations. He often worked with Peterson after practice to get a better understanding of his defensive keys and to improve his stance and his backpedaling skills. This year defensive coordinator Ron Meeks wants Thornton to react more instinctively. There are no such concerns about his tackling ability, however. Team-

mates still rave about his special teams play last season. "Let's just say if David hits people on defense like he hit them on special teams, he's going to be some-

HEAVY HITTER Thornton is still learning the nuances of his position, but there's no question about his tackling ability.

EZRA SHAW/GETTY IMAGES



UNDER THE GUN

► The Colts are still waiting for wideout **REGGIE WAYNE**, their first-round draft pick in 2001, to be a meaningful contributor on a weekly basis. With the release of Qadry Ismail, Wayne is the team's No. 2 receiver. But he still has to win over quarterback Peyton Manning, who has yet to show great confidence in his young teammate.

thing,” says tight end Marcus Pollard.

Coming out of Goldsboro High, Thornton was hardly thought of as anything unique. As a senior he weighed 170 pounds and played quarterback and safety. He received two scholarship offers, both from Division II schools, then walked on at North Carolina as a linebacker. Coach Carl Torbush promised him a scholarship after his junior year, but when Torbush was subsequently fired, Thornton had to prove himself all over again to new coach John Bunting, a former NFL linebacker and assistant coach. Thornton held onto his scholarship with a strong showing in spring practice, then led the Tar Heels in tackles during his senior season.

Some analysts said that the Colts got a bargain when they snapped him up early on the second day of the draft.

Thornton hasn't forgotten what he went through on the road to becoming an NFL starter. He uses that as motivation, playing with a passion that Indy must have on defense. Though the unit improved last year in the defensive-minded Dungy's first season, it still surrendered 124.5 rushing yards a game, which ranked 20th in the league. But the Jets' 41-0 rout of the Colts in an AFC wild-card playoff last January showed how far the defense still has to go.

This year Indianapolis will keep its defenders fresh by using a deep rotation up front featuring second-year speed rusher Dwight Freeney, who had 13 sacks as a rookie. The key is getting the linemen more comfortable with Dungy's single-gap system. “The players have shown a passion for being more precise, which you need in this defense,” says Dungy, who guided the Colts to a 10-6 record last year. “They know that if everybody does their job, the scheme will work. Now that they have an appreciation for that, nobody wants to be the person who winds up out of position.”

Thornton, of course, is the one player who can least afford a gaffe—or a costly injury. His backup is Cato June, a rookie sixth-round draft pick who played safety at Michigan. But Thornton doesn't appear overly concerned. “Ever since I've been here, I've been focused on what I can do to help this team win,” he says. “It started with opportunities on special teams and in the nickel, and now I have to get it done as a starter.” —J.C.

ENEMY LINES

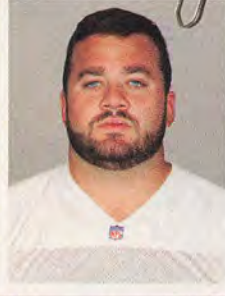
An opposing scout's view

I'm not sure anyone ever completely comes back from an ACL injury, but can **Edgerrin James** get back to being a real good running back? Certainly. . . . **Marvin Harrison** will catch 10 balls in a game and be ticked off because he could've had 12. He'll play another 10 years because he doesn't get hit. When he catches the ball, he's either getting out of bounds, going down or running by you. . . . I like **Jeff Saturday**. He's quick and maintains solid blocking angles. . . . Their offensive personality is part of their problem. I'm not sure that throwing the ball all the time can

“Their offensive personality is part of their problem. Teams think they can bully the Colts.”

win in the playoffs, and a lot of teams think they can bully the Colts. It's hard to preach toughness when your linemen are always backing up to pass-protect. It's also hard for your defense to play tough—your guys start to get passive because they're practicing against a pass-oriented system, and then they're on the field too long. . . . They've tried to add speed in the secondary, but I think they'll still have trouble. . . . **Dwight Freeney** will create a lot of mayhem coming off the edge, and they need **Larry Tripplett** to become a force in the middle. He's a big guy, but he plays too soft.

SATURDAY



SCHEDULE

Sept. 7	at Cleveland
14	TENNESSEE
21	JACKSONVILLE
28	at New Orleans
Oct. 6	at Tampa Bay (Mon.)
12	CAROLINA
19	Open date
26	HOUSTON
Nov. 2	at Miami
9	at Jacksonville
16	N.Y. JETS
23	at Buffalo
30	NEW ENGLAND
Dec. 7	at Tennessee
14	ATLANTA
21	DENVER
28	at Houston

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 14
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .518
Games against playoff teams: 6

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD: 10-6

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 26/4/9
DEFENSE 20/2/8

COACH: Tony Dungy, second season with Indianapolis (64-48 in NFL)

EDGERRIN JAMES

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
RB	22	277	989	3.6
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
61	354	5.8	3	

PEYTON MANNING

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	26	591	392	66.3
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
4,200	27	19	88.8	

MARVIN HARRISON

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	15	143	1,722	11

DALLAS CLARK (R)

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	218	43	742	4

TARIK GLENN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 5"	332 lbs.	16	16

RICK DEMULLING

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 4"	304 lbs.	14	14

JEFF SATURDAY

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 2"	291 lbs.	16	16

STEVE SCIULLO (R)

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 5"	330 lbs.	12	12

RYAN DIEM

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 6"	331 lbs.	16	16

MARCUS POLLARD

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	150	43	478	6

REGGIE WAYNE

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	164	49	716	4

DEFENSE

RE	DWIGHT FREENEY	46 tackles	13 sacks
RT	LARRY TRIPPLETT	21 tackles	0 sacks
LT	MONTE REAGOR	20 tackles	1 sack
LE	CHAD BRATZKE	45 tackles	6 sacks
OLB	MARCUS WASHINGTON	66 tackles	2 sacks
MLB	ROB MORRIS	100 tackles	3 sacks
OLB	DAVID THORNTON	33 tackles	0 sacks
CB	DAVID MACKLIN	56 tackles	1 int.
SS	MIKE DOSS (R)	107 tackles	2 int.
FS	IDREES BASHIR	50 tackles	2 int.
CB	WALT HARRIS	44 tackles	2 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS

PVR				
K	MIKE VANDERJAGT	183	34/34 XPs	23/31 FGs 103 pts.
PR	TROY WALTERS	323	35 ret.	21.7 avg. 0 TDs
KR	DOMINIC RHODES*	242	14 ret.	25.4 avg. 1 TD
P	HUNTER SMITH		66 punts	40.5 avg.

New acquisition (R) Rookie (statistics for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 89) *2001 stats

Before Aging

After Aging

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AFC
SOUTH

3

JACKSONVILLE

Jaguars

A new, less dictatorial coach and a fun-loving defensive star have everyone smiling at last

A CURIOUS reporter posed the question, and Hugh Douglas answered the only way he knows—candidly. The period for signing unrestricted free agents was only a few days old when Douglas was asked if he might join the Jaguars following five seasons with the Eagles. He said if he did, it would be “only for the money.”

It was a throwaway line, but now that the three-time Pro Bowl defensive end is a Jaguar, he's still trying to live it down. He says he hadn't realized at the time that Jacksonville ranked higher in total defense (20th in the NFL) than his most ardent suitors, Kansas City and Seattle. Nor had he studied Jacksonville's roster closely enough to see that it had some really talented players. “Eventually I realized the situation wasn't that bad,” he says.

Though Douglas did go for the money (he received a \$6 million signing bonus), he believes Jacksonville has more promise than last season's 6-10 record might suggest. Jack Del Rio, the player-friendly new coach who was hired last January to replace straitlaced Tom Coughlin, wants his defense to set a tone, and the 6'2", 280-pound Douglas should be just what the Jaguars' tepid pass rush needed. Douglas has 73½ sacks in eight NFL seasons, and last year he notched 12½, despite play-

ing nearly half the season with a painful bone bruise on his left knee. Jacksonville had only 36 sacks in 2002, and no Jaguar got more than 6½.

Mike Smith, the Jaguars' new defensive coordinator, loves Douglas's exceptional lower-body strength, quick hands and relentlessly aggressive play. Smith also hopes

that Douglas will have a positive impact in the locker room. He was the resident jester in Philadelphia, gleefully baiting teammates and often supplying the fun-

EYED EAGLE The Jaguars showed they are serious about upgrading their defense by luring Douglas away from Philadelphia.

BILL FRANKS



UNDER THE GUN

► Cornerback **FERNANDO BRYANT** is a four-year starter, but at 5'10", 180 pounds, he may be too small for coach Jack Del Rio, who loves big corners. That's why he tried trading Bryant this spring. Bryant still has good instincts and terrific closing speed, but he's in the final year of his contract. He'll spend most of this season auditioning for other teams.

niest quotes to reporters. He has been more subdued since coming to Jacksonville, but Del Rio says, "He'll lighten things up, which is what we want to do with this group."

Douglas, 32, has already found plenty of other jokesters in his new workplace. "I think I'm getting paid back for all the stuff I pulled in Philadelphia," he says. "There isn't a day that goes by that I'm not the butt of somebody's joke. [Linebacker] Eric Westmoreland rips on my hair and my clothes every chance he gets. I've learned there's a lot of personality on this team. The guys probably couldn't show it under the last coach, but they're letting it out now."

Jacksonville's defense could create problems for opponents if Douglas hits double digits in sacks. The health of defensive end Tony Brackens—who is recovering from an appendectomy and microfracture surgery on his left knee—remains uncertain, but promising defensive tackles John Henderson and Marcus Stroud, who each had 6½ sacks in 2002, are both back. Seeking to improve the unit's speed, the Jaguars added free-agent linebackers Mike Peterson, who led the Colts in tackles in 2002, and Keith Mitchell. Jacksonville should be more aggressive, reflecting the principles Del Rio used while coordinating a Panthers' defense that ranked second in the league last season. "Our attitude is focused on playing faster," says strong safety Donovan Darius. "Last year we were passive. We played a lot of zone and read-and-react schemes, and at times we weren't all on the same page. I can already tell we'll be more in sync."

The 40-year-old Del Rio has injected energy into a franchise that sorely needed it after eight seasons under the dictatorial Coughlin. The new coach acknowledges he doesn't have a great feel for his team yet. "I'm looking forward to seeing how they respond when adversity hits," he says.

Douglas is ready. He's heard talk that the large signing bonus he received will sap his motivation and that his knee might be worse than he'll admit. He scoffs at both suggestions. "I don't know when all these issues came up with me," he says. "Everything was fine when I was helping Philadelphia make the playoffs. Now my age is a factor and my knee is a question mark. But people can say what they want. If I just play my game, I'll be fine." —J.C.

ENEMY LINES

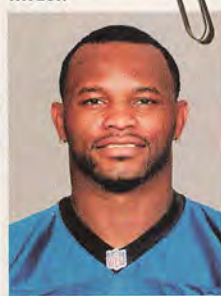
An opposing scout's view

Offensively, I think they're trying to get their line settled for the next few years. They've got a lot of young guys up front, and they signed a good player in **Chris Naeole**. He gives them a surly attitude, and if he gets his hands on a guy, you can forget about it. He's a mauler. . . . If they get that line set, they have to feel good about their running game, because **Fred Taylor** is the most underrated back in this league. He's injury-prone, but when he's healthy, he's scary. . . . I don't know what their deal is with **Mark Brunell**. We think he's a very good quarterback, but they screw with him

"Taylor is the most underrated back in the league. When he's healthy, he's scary."

every year. . . . Obviously **Hugh Douglas** isn't a long-term answer, but he should give them one or two good years. . . . They need **Tony Brackens** to get healthy. He was on the verge of being great, a guy who could get 15 sacks a year, but he's never come back from the knee injury he had a few years ago. . . . The addition of **Mike Peterson** was big. I liked him when he was in Indianapolis because he gave [the Colts] some personality. . . . They've really improved their personnel. The question is, how well can **Jack Del Rio** and [club vice president] **James Harris** work together?

TAYLOR



SCHEDULE

Sept. 7	at Carolina
14	BUFFALO
21	at Indianapolis
28	at Houston
Oct. 5	SAN DIEGO
12	MIAMI
19	Open date
26	TENNESSEE
Nov. 2	at Baltimore
9	INDIANAPOLIS
16	at Tennessee
23	at N.Y. Jets
30	TAMPA BAY
Dec. 7	HOUSTON
14	at New England
21	NEW ORLEANS
28	at Atlanta

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 5
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .537
Games against playoff teams: 6

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD: 6-10

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 10/28/25

DEFENSE 25/14/20

COACH: Jack Del Rio;
first season with
Jacksonville (0-0 in NFL)

FRED TAYLOR

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	40	287	1,314	4.6
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
49	408	8.3	8	

MARK BRUNELL

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	72	416	245	58.9
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
2,788	17	7	85.7	

MARC EDWARDS

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	272	31	96	3.1
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
23	196	8.5	0	

J.J. STOKES

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	161	32	332	1

KYLE BRADY

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	219	43	461	4

MIKE PEARSON

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 7"	303 lbs.	16	11

JAMAR NESBIT

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 4"	330 lbs.	14	13

BRAD MEESTER

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 3"	295 lbs.	16	16

CHRIS NAEOLE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 3"	314 lbs.	16	16

MAURICE WILLIAMS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 5"	310 lbs.	5	5

MATT HATCHETTE*

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	225	2	44	0

DEFENSE

RE	HUGH DOUGLAS	53 tackles	12½ sacks
RT	JOHN HENDERSON	54 tackles	6½ sacks
LT	MARCUS STROUD	48 tackles	6½ sacks
LE	MARCO COLEMAN	36 tackles	5 sacks
OLB	AKIN AYODELE	56 tackles	3 sacks
MLB	MIKE PETERSON	136 tackles	3 int.
OLB	KEITH MITCHELL	28 tackles	1 sack
CB	JASON CRAFT	58 tackles	3 int.
SS	DONOVIN DARIUS	78 tackles	1 int.
FS	MARLON MCCREE	71 tackles	6 int.
CB	FERNANDO BRYANT	59 tackles	1 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS PVR

K	SETH MARLER (R)	241	29/33 XPs	20/33 FGs	89 pts.
PR	JERMAINE LEWIS	278	36 ret.	7.8 avg.	0 TDs
KR	JERMAINE LEWIS	278	46 ret.	20.9 avg.	0 TDs
P	CHRIS HANSON		81 punts	44.2 avg.	

New acquisition (R) Rookie (statistics for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 89) *2001 statistics

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imagination at work



AFC
SOUTH

4

HOUSTON

Texans

David Carr and the NFL's worst offense won't get better until the play improves along the line

WHILE THE Texans' offensive linemen munched on grilled burgers and steaks in David Carr's backyard in early July, the team's second-year left tackle, Chester Pitts, asked for a moment alone with the quarterback. Pitts wanted Carr to know that this season would be different from last, that Pitts was more confident that he could protect Carr's backside. Carr nodded. He knows that Pitts's eyes never lie. They droop when he's down. They come alive when he's happy. And when they gazed at Carr that afternoon, they told the quarterback that Pitts meant what he said.

In the expansion team's first season last year, Pitts was rushed into the lineup for injured All-Pro Tony Boselli and wound up starting all 16 games as a rookie. The plan had been to use Pitts, a second-round draft pick, as Boselli's backup, but Pitts survived in what was a horrid year for the line: Carr was sacked an NFL-record 76 times. Pitts was charged with only 12 of those sacks, but that didn't give him much solace.

Pitts had plenty to learn about his position and, when Boselli was unable to return to full health and retired in July, he would have to learn quickly. In the first weeks of training camp Pitts was impressive. In addition to adding 10 pounds of muscle to his 6' 4" frame, bulking up to

330, he has improved his technique, reacting better to countermoves and, to avoid holding penalties, keeping his hands tight to the body while pass-blocking. "Chester has really matured," says Texans offensive line coach Tony Marciano. "He's asking good questions, and when he makes a mistake, he realizes it immedi-

ately. When something went wrong last year, he'd get a look on his face that said, 'What am I supposed to be doing?'"

"The game has slowed down some for

UPRIGHT Carr was sacked an NFL-record 76 times last year, but Pitts (center) and crew believe they'll do better this season.

PAUL JASIEWSKI



UNDER THE GUN

► **CHARLIE CLEMONS** takes over at outside linebacker for Jeff Posey, Houston's top pass rusher last season who signed with the Bills as a free agent. Clemons logged 13½ sacks for the Saints in 2001 but had only one-half sack last year. The Texans' defense is built around the linebackers, but Clemons has never played in a 3-4 scheme.

me," says Pitts. "When I watch film now, I can pick things up faster, and when I'm playing, I have a better sense of what a player is trying to do to me. All that helps, but in the end I still have to go out and block people like [the Dolphins'] Jason Taylor and [the Jaguars'] Hugh Douglas."

Pitts's development is stunning in light of his background. His high school in Los Angeles didn't have a football team, and he walked on at San Diego State in 1998 (on the advice of Aztecs tackle Kyle Turley, now with the Rams). Last season Pitts played in as many games (21, including five exhibitions) as he did in his college career. "They threw me into a pot of boiling water, but I took it as a compliment," he says. "They knew I'd fight and I wouldn't quit."

Pitts, Carr and center Steve McKinney were the only three players on the Texans' offense to appear in every game. Pitts, 24, and McKinney, 27, are the foundation for a line that must dramatically improve for Carr and Houston to succeed. In going 4-12 last year, Houston had the league's worst offense (223.3 yards a game). Offensive coordinator Chris Palmer says he expects the line to give up a third fewer sacks than it did last season, but that might be unrealistic for this group.

Left guard Milford Brown hasn't played a down since the team selected him in the sixth round of last year's supplemental draft. Right tackle Greg Randall started 17 games for the Patriots during their Super Bowl run in 2001, but played in only seven games for New England last season. Right guard Zach Wiegert, a free-agent pickup with eight years' experience, brings veteran leadership. "I think we'll be better," says coach Dom Capers. "Our plan last year was to have Boselli and Ryan Young [a tackle who left for Dallas in free agency] set the tone, but when they got hurt, we had to find other options. Now we have a group that has a chance to build cohesiveness."

Pitts takes the same optimistic approach, but that doesn't mean he's overconfident. He's seen the schedule. Speed rushers such as Taylor, the Titans' Jevon Kearse, the Colts' Dwight Freeney and the Bucs' Simeon Rice await him. "Let's just say I'm better acclimated to what I have to do," Pitts says. "I understand our offense and my role better. But when I think about the people I have to go against, I'll never call this job easy."

"They were the best expansion team ever because of their talent on defense."

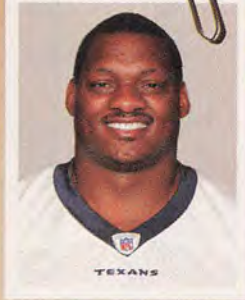
ever because of the talent on that side of the ball. . . . **Gary Walker** is as intense as they come. He'll stuff the run, and he's quick enough to pressure quarterbacks. . . . **Seth Payne** is an ideal 3-4 nosetackle. He plays with great leverage, and he's smart. . . . I thought **Jamie Sharper** was a good linebacker in Baltimore, and he showed why last season. . . . I wasn't surprised that **Aaron Glenn** made the Pro Bowl. He's always been one of the league's top cornerbacks. He'll bait quarterbacks into making bad decisions, and he's super aggressive.

ENEMY LINES

An opposing scout's view

CC Andre Johnson will help David Carr, because he's got great size and speed. Once he develops, Johnson will be a receiver who demands extra attention. **Jabar Gaffney** is better suited as a No. 2 receiver, because he drops too many balls. . . . They need some help in the running game. I don't know if **Stacey Mack** is the answer. He's a good short-yardage back, but I question whether he can do much else. . . . Carr has the tools to be a great quarterback, but they have to get that line straightened out. . . . Defensively, they should be solid. They were the best expansion team

WALKER



SCHEDULE

Sept.	7	at Miami
	14	at New Orleans
	21	KANSAS CITY
	28	JACKSONVILLE
Oct.	5	Open date
	12	at Tennessee
	19	N.Y. JETS
	26	at Indianapolis
Nov.	2	CAROLINA
	9	at Cincinnati
	16	at Buffalo
	23	NEW ENGLAND
	30	ATLANTA
Dec.	7	at Jacksonville
	14	at Tampa Bay
	21	TENNESSEE
	28	INDIANAPOLIS

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 7
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .533
Games against playoff teams: 7

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD: 4-12

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 31/32/32

DEFENSE 28/10/16

COACH: Dom Capers;
second season with
Houston (34-46 in NFL)

STACEY MACK				
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	85	98	436	4.4
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
11	79	7.2	9	

DAVID CARR				
POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	110	444	233	52.5
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
2,592	9	15	62.8	

MORAN NORRIS				
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	425	0	0	—
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
0	0	—	0	

ANDRE JOHNSON (R)				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	108	52	1,092	9

BILLY MILLER				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	181	51	613	3

CHESTER PITTS				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 4"	330 lbs.	16	16

MILFORD BROWN				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 4"	316 lbs.	0	0

STEVE MCKINNEY				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 4"	295 lbs.	16	16

ZACH WIEGERT				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 5"	309 lbs.	7	7

GREG RANDALL				
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 5"	322 lbs.	7	2

COREY BRADFORD				
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	142	45	697	6

DEFENSE

RE	JERRY DELOACH	32 tackles	1 sack
NT	SETH PAYNE	65 tackles	1 sack
LE	GARY WALKER	52 tackles	6½ sacks
OLB	CHARLIE CLEMONS	84 tackles	½ sack
ILB	JAY FOREMAN	137 tackles	0 sacks
ILB	JAMIE SHARPER	137 tackles	5½ sacks
OLB	KAILEE WONG	44 tackles	5½ sacks
CB	MARCUS COLEMAN	72 tackles	1 int.
SS	ERIC BROWN	67 tackles	2 int.
FS	MATT STEVENS	83 tackles	1 int.
CB	AARON GLENN	67 tackles	5 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS PVR

K	KRIS BROWN	259	20/20 XPs	17/24 FGs	71 pts.
PR	AVION BLACK	322	14 ret.	13.4 avg.	1 TDs
KR	AVION BLACK	322	24 ret.	22.0 avg.	0 TDs
P	CHAD STANLEY	114	punts	41.4 avg.	

New acquisition (R) Rookie (statistics for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 89)

AFC
EAST

1

BUFFALO Bills

Defensive help has arrived for a team and a coach that are facing a make-or-break season

TWO YEARS ago, in his first season as Buffalo coach, Gregg Williams inherited a team with \$21 million in dead cap space and a crying need for a quarterback. The Bills finished 3-13. Last year they still had \$18 million in dead cap money, and they had solved the quarterback problem by trading for Drew Bledsoe, but the defense was shaky. They finished 8-8, one game behind the AFC East-winning Jets, in the most competitive division in the NFL.

Williams is now in the last year of a contract that has not been extended. The dead cap money has just about cleared up, defensive help has arrived, and the buzz around Buffalo is that the Bills have to go at least 9-7 and make some kind of a play-off run for Williams to keep his job.

"Not so," says president and general manager Tom Donohoe, who holds Williams's fate in his hands. "We want to be fair to the coaches regarding things they have no control over, like injuries, but at the same time we want to see an improved, competitive team."

The top priority was fixing the defense, and the first of the free agents to arrive was Jeff Posey, an outside rusher who led the Texans in sacks last year. Two weeks later the Bills showed the world they were serious by putting together a \$32 million pack-

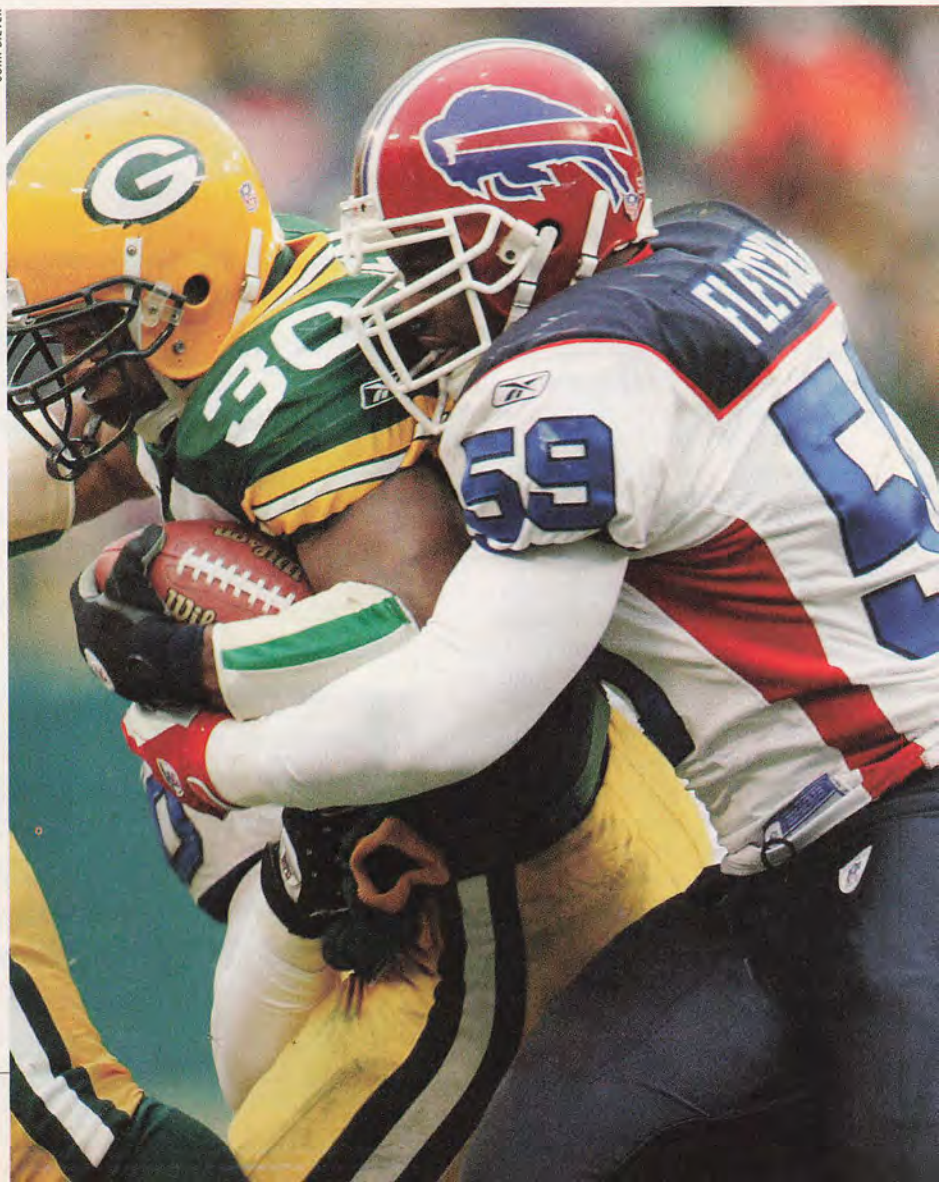
age to land the Bengals' Takeo Spikes, the most highly sought defensive free agent and the finest linebacker never to have been chosen for the Pro Bowl. Call it his misfortune for having spent five years in Cincinnati.

"The Buffalo fans are one reason I was so happy to come here," Spikes says. "Last year we played them in the last game of

the season. When I came on the field, I got this big cheer. There were fans in Bengals jerseys. After the game I asked one of them, 'Aren't you a Bills fan?' He said, 'Today I'm

TOP BILLING With Fletcher anchoring the middle, Buffalo's defense will be led by its linebackers, one of the NFL's premier trios.

JOHN BIEVER



UNDER THE GUN

► Last season **JOSH REED** was the third wideout in Drew Bledsoe's vertical passing game, working mostly from the slot. Now he's the No. 2 guy, replacing Peerless Price, who took his 94 catches to Atlanta. How smoothly Reed adapts to being an every-down player is a key to the Bills' success through the air. "All I can do is keep working hard," he says.

a Spikes fan.' I mean these fans knew I was going to be a free agent, and it was their way of telling me they wanted me here."

A gifted pass defender from his weak-side spot, instinctive and explosive filling the hole on running plays, Spikes, teamed with Posey and London Fletcher, gives Buffalo one of the best linebacking corps in football. Something had to be done about the defensive line, though, so the Bills drafted Chris Kelsay, an outside rusher, in the second round, and made their third big free-agent move by picking up Sam Adams, the gigantic tackle.

This is where the plan might break down. Adams, who has been hailed as some sort of savior for the Bills, gradually wore out his welcome after a six-year run in Seattle, got his game in order and put together two Pro Bowl seasons with Baltimore, and then spent a nonproductive 2002 season with the Raiders, who cut him. He's on the downside of a basically underachieving career. "Not here, he won't be," Williams says. "Have you ever heard of a coach we have named Tim Krumrie?"

Krumrie is one of five new coaches the Bills hired this season. Two of them, Dick LeBeau (assistant to the head coach) and Les Steckel (running backs), have been head coaches in the NFL, giving Buffalo three former top men among their assistants. (Offensive coordinator Kevin Gilbride is the third.) Krumrie, the defensive line coach, is the most colorful member of the staff: a former collegiate wrestler, 12 years as a Bengals nosetackle, a booming voice that can be heard all over the practice field, a fitness maniac at 43 and good for three full workouts every day at camp. "I need them to clear my head from the meetings," he says.

In February, Williams came up with the idea of Chemistry Day, in which each position coach would take his guys out on some getting-to-know-you project. "They took 'em out to play pool, to go bowling," Krumrie says. "I took my 10 linemen into the shed. One-on-one against me, bull in the ring. I took 'em on one at a time, roughed 'em up, put it to 'em a little bit. That was my way of them getting to know me.

"Big Sam? Oh, he'll work," Krumrie says. "We'll see to that."

"I'm in awe of the staff I've got to work with now," Williams says. "I'm not worried about my contract. If you work hard, those things have a way of taking care of themselves."

—Paul Zimmerman

ENEMY LINES

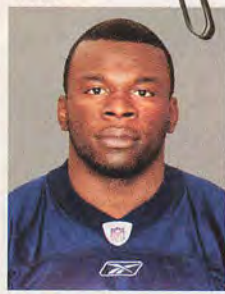
An opposing scout's view

“Drafting [running back] **Willis McGahee** in the first round, a guy who won't be ready to play for another year, was an arrogant pick—the kind you see from a defending Super Bowl champ that's building its depth for the future. I don't know what the Bills have in mind, and I don't see how **Gregg Williams** can be too happy about it. . . . Last year their offense scared you two ways: **Drew Bledsoe** going deep and **Travis Henry** running the draw. They're still geared for the deep ball, but they've changed their offense and gotten rid of guys—fullback Larry Centers and tight end Jay

“Drafting Willis McGahee was an arrogant pick. I don't know what the Bills have in mind.”

Riemersma—who didn't fit **Kevin Gilbride**'s system. I think getting rid of Centers, a true third-down back, will hurt them. . . . I keep hearing how great their offensive line is, but I don't see it. **Ruben Brown** holds as much as any player in the league. **Mike Williams**, their first-round draft pick last year, didn't show great progress. **Jonas Jennings** is good, and **Trey Teague** is O.K., though he's a little too tall for the position. . . . The Bills will be competitive in the division because they'll play hard for Williams and because the AFC East has no clear stickout team. Anyone can win it, anyone can finish last.

HENRY



SCHEDULE

Sept.	7	NEW ENGLAND
	14	at Jacksonville
	21	at Miami
	28	PHILADELPHIA
Oct.	5	CINCINNATI
	12	at N.Y. Jets
	19	WASHINGTON
	26	at Kansas City
Nov.	2	Open date
	9	at Dallas
	16	HOUSTON
	23	INDIANAPOLIS
	30	at N.Y. Giants
Dec.	7	N.Y. JETS
	14	at Tennessee
	21	MIAMI
	27	at New England (Sat.)

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 17
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .504
Games against playoff teams: 6

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD: 8-8

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 24/5/11

DEFENSE 29/6/15

COACH: Gregg Williams, third season with Buffalo (11-21 in NFL)

TRAVIS HENRY

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	16	325	1,438	4.4
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
43	309	7.2	14	

DREW BLEDSOE

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	19	610	375	61.5
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
4,359	24	15	86.0	

PHILLIP CROSBY

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	383	0	0	—
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
4	33	8.3	0	

ERIC MOULDS

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	24	100	1,292	10

DAVE MOORE

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	198	16	141	2

JONAS JENNINGS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 3"	320 lbs.	15	15

RUBEN BROWN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 3"	304 lbs.	16	16

TREY TEAGUE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 5"	292 lbs.	16	16

MIKE PUCILLO

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 4"	316 lbs.	0	0

MIKE WILLIAMS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 6"	370 lbs.	14	14

JOSH REED

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	87	37	509	2

DEFENSE

RE	AARON SCHOBEL	52 tackles	8½ sacks
RT	PAT WILLIAMS	84 tackles	½ sack
LT	SAM ADAMS	22 tackles	2 sacks
LE	RYAN DENNEY	9 tackles	0 sacks
DLB	JEFF POSEY	60 tackles	8 sacks
MLB	LONDON FLETCHER	149 tackles	3 sacks
DLB	TAKED SPIKES	113 tackles	1½ sacks
CB	NATE CLEMENTS	64 tackles	6 int.
SS	COY WIRE	92 tackles	3 sacks
FS	PIERSON PRIOLEAU	86 tackles	0 int.
CB	ANTOINE WINFIELD	56 tackles	0 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS PVR

K	RIAN LINDELL	222	38/38 XPs	23/29 FGs	107 pts.
PR	BOBBY SHAW	208	25 ret.	12.4 avg.	1 TD
KR	BOBBY SHAW	208	3 ret.	17.7 avg.	0 TDs
P	BRIAN MOORMAN		66 punts	43.1 avg.	

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AFC
EAST

2

NEW ENGLAND

Patriots

While the offense stands pat, a rebuilt defense looks to regain that Super Bowl swagger

"IT WAS," says new Patriots safety Rodney Harrison, "the most inspirational thing I've ever been around."

His team, the 1998 Chargers, finished 5-11, last in the AFC West. The offense committed 51 turnovers. No other team was close. Yet the San Diego defense finished No. 1 in the NFL.

"You'd see guys crying on the plane home," Harrison says. "So many turnovers, so much frustration. But our defense had this thing going, and it just snowballed. Guys working, working, coming in at all hours, lifting weights, studying."

"The offense would throw an interception," Harrison says. "Boom, we stop them, three and out. We're on the bench, we don't even get our helmets off, and our offense gives them the ball back again. Clap hands, let's go. We stop them again, three and out. What a feeling! That's what I came here for, to get the feeling back."

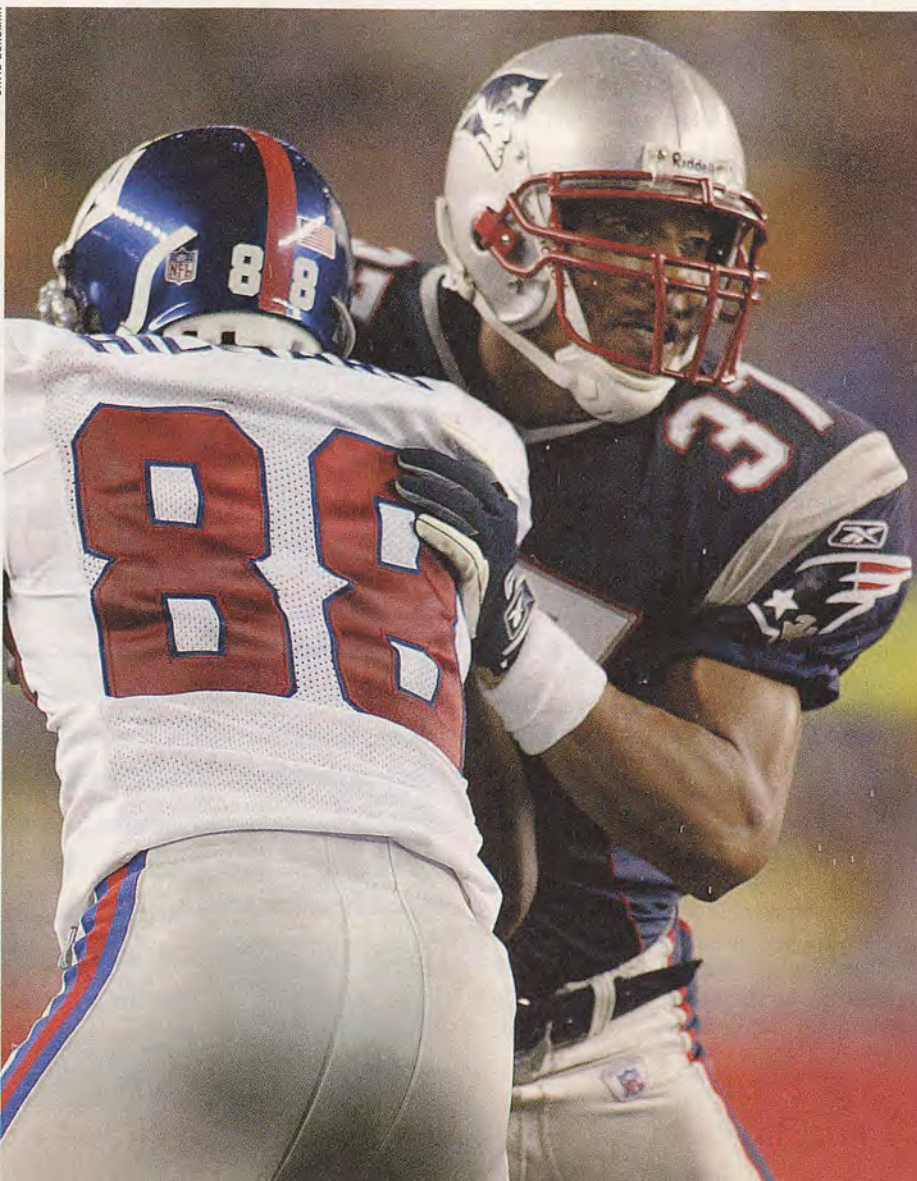
Defense sank New England last year and kept the defending Super Bowl champ out of the playoffs. The base defense didn't have the speed to keep up with the fast teams, and when the Pats put a speed unit on the field, it got muscled. Seven enemy ballcarriers rushed for more than 100 yards against the Patriots. One of them, the Dolphins' Ricky Williams, did it twice.

So coach Bill Belichick sat down with his vice president of player personnel, Scott Pioli. They drew up a list of the kind of players they wanted: hitters, tough guys, people who could run. They went the big-money route for ex-Bear Roosevelt Colvin, one of the plums of the free-agent market: a linebacker in the base unit and a devas-

tating edge rusher on the nickel. Best of all, he's only 25. A day later they picked up Harrison, who'd been cut by the Chargers after nine seasons, four of which ended

ALL BUSINESS Harrison was close to signing with Oakland before the Pats' philosophy—"no b.s."—won him over.

DAVID BERGMAN



UNDER THE GUN

► Last year **ANTOWAIN SMITH** played like an average NFL back, and New England had no ground game to take the pressure off Tom Brady. The Pats did not bring in a big-name back in the off-season, hoping that Smith's fire, which burned hot two years ago, would return. But coach Bill Belichick hasn't been effusive in his praise of Smith.

with his teammates voting him their defensive player of the year.

"The club figured that, at 30, I couldn't run anymore," Harrison says. "I'd suffered a groin pull in the first game last year. The muscle was 30 percent off the bone. The doctors told me I'd miss eight weeks. I missed two. I guess the Patriots feel I can run well enough."

Harrison was visiting the Raiders' complex in March when Pioli reached his agent, Steve Feldman. Don't sign anything, Pioli told Feldman. Come see us first.

Harrison was in Boston the next day. "The first thing Coach Belichick told me was, 'I like the way you warm up, the intensity of it,'" he says. "I'm thinking, Damn, this guy really knows football. So we sat there and talked, the coach, Scott Pioli and me, and they told me, 'You give us a chance to win,' and that's what I needed to hear. No b.s., no winning and dining, just straight football."

Colvin, who had serious offers from five other teams, essentially told the same story. "I sat in their office, and Scott Pioli was excited, and Coach Belichick was excited, and after a while, so was I. The coach talked about the great linebackers he had on the Giants, Pepper Johnson and Carl Banks and Lawrence Taylor, and all the plans he had for me and how I'd fit into their defense. Some of the other teams I'd talked to wanted to take me out for dinner and show me a good time, but you can keep all that stuff."

"Bill and I have a rule," Pioli says. "If a guy needs the sizzle, he's not for us."

Colvin will be a solid outside rusher in the nickel package. Harrison will play right safety in Belichick's left-right alignment which means he'll be the free safety most of the time, expected to cover more ground.

Four of New England's first five draft choices this year were defensive players. One interesting choice was fourth-rounder Dan Klecko, son of Joe Klecko, the great leader of the Jets' Sack Exchange of the 1980s. The younger Klecko is an undersized nosetackle at 5' 11", 283, but an exotic specimen as an outside rusher, where the Pats have been experimenting with him. "Great motor," Belichick says of Klecko, who had 2½ sacks in his first preseason game. "You want him on the field somewhere. We just haven't figured out where."

The offense has basically the same people as last season. The defense had to change. It already has, for the better. —P.Z.

ENEMY LINES

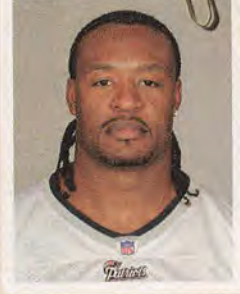
An opposing scout's view

CC Their defense was abysmal last year. Now they've got old guys and unproven players. **Richard Seymour** is pretty good, but who else is there up front who really excites you? **Ty Warren**, the rookie? . . . I like their linebackers, though. If they can get a decent year out of **Willie McGinest**, they're set. He's a hybrid type of player who has to be managed; he has to be used in just the right situations. . . . They cut right corner Otis Smith, so their second-round draft choice [**Eugene Wilson**] really needs to come on in a hurry. **Ty Law** is still a player, and their safeties will make it dangerous going

"Their receivers are small. Last year there was no threat of a running game."

over the middle, provided **Rodney Harrison** can still run and keep from getting hurt. . . . That's a lot of ifs. There are almost as many on offense. I've been a **Tom Brady** fan ever since he brought them back from 10 points down against San Diego in their Super Bowl year. Last year he broke down at times, but he wasn't getting much help. . . . Their receivers are small. Last year there was no threat of a running game. Having right guard **Joe Andruzzi** playing on a bad knee really hurt them, and we still don't know if he's going to be all the way back. If he is, they've got a chance to run the ball.

McGINEST



SCHEDULE

Sept. 7	at Buffalo
14	at Philadelphia
21	N.Y. JETS
28	at Washington
Oct. 5	TENNESSEE
12	N.Y. GIANTS
19	at Miami
26	CLEVELAND
Nov. 3	at Denver (Mon.)
10	Open date
16	DALLAS
23	at Houston
30	at Indianapolis
Dec. 7	MIAMI
14	JACKSONVILLE
20	at N.Y. Jets (Sat.)
27	BUFFALO (Sat.)

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 8
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .527
Games against playoff teams: 7

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD: 9-7

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):

OFFENSE 28/12/21

DEFENSE 31/11/23

COACH: Bill Belichick; fourth season with New England (61-67 in NFL)

ANTOWAIN SMITH

POS.	PVR	ATT.	TDs	AVG.
RB	62	252	982	3.9
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
31	243	7.8	8	

TOM BRADY

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	12	601	373	62.1
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
3,764	28	14	85.7	

FRED MCCRARY

POS.	PVR	ATT.	TDs	AVG.
FB	368	2	1	0.5
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
22	96	4.4	3	

TROY BROWN

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	47	97	890	3

CHRISTIAN FAURIA

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	166	27	253	7

MATT LIGHT

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	QMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 4"	305 lbs.	16	16

MIKE COMPTON

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	QMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 6"	310 lbs.	16	16

DAMIEN WOODY

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	QMS.	STARTS
C	6' 3"	320 lbs.	16	15

JOE ANDRUZZI

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	QMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 3"	312 lbs.	13	13

KENYATTA JONES

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	QMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 3"	310 lbs.	13	11

DAVID PATTEN

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	160	61	824	5

DEFENSE

RE	BOBBY HAMILTON	55 tackles	2 sacks
NT	TED WASHINGTON	5 tackles	0 sacks
LE	RICHARD SEYMOUR	56 tackles	5½ sacks
OLB	MIKE VRABEL	75 tackles	4½ sacks
ILB	ROMAN PHIFER	109 tackles	½ sack
ILB	TED JOHNSON	96 tackles	1½ sacks
OLB	ROSEVELT COLVIN	64 tackles	10½ sacks
CB	ASANTE SAMUEL (R)	48 tackles	4 int.
SS	LAWYER MILLOY	91 tackles	0 int.
FS	RODNEY HARRISON	88 tackles	2 int.
CB	TY LAW	77 tackles	4 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS PVR

K	ADAM VINATIERI	199	36/36 XPs	27/30 FGs	117 pts.
PR	TROY BROWN	47	24 ret.	7.3 avg.	0 TDs
KR	KEVIN FAULK	189	26 ret.	27.9 avg.	2 TDs
P	KEN WALTER		70 punts	38.9 avg.	

■ New acquisition (R) Rookie (statistics for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 89)

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 **TOYOTA**

AFC
EAST

3

MIAMI

Dolphins

It's put-up-or-shut-up time for a team loaded with talent and a ready excuse for every failure

ONE YEAR the Dolphins blamed their late-season fade on intense early-season practices that took away their legs. So now the practices are lighter.

For a while they complained about an inconsistent running game. Then Ricky Williams led the NFL in rushing in 2002, and Miami still missed the postseason. They can talk about the six games that their quarterback, Jay Fiedler, sat out last year with a broken right thumb and how the 2-4 record during that span hurt them dearly, but the season still came down to the last two games, against the Vikings and the Patriots. The Dolphins blew a lead in each game and lost.

"Seems like every year at this time I give you an excuse," middle linebacker Zach Thomas says. "Then I say what has to be done, and we do it, and the next year there's a different excuse. But what they've done this year is pack the team with so much talent that we won't be able to blow it. We're so loaded that there just won't be any excuses."

They all know it. They get the feeling they're playing on some kind of Pro Bowl roster. Las Vegas has made Miami the short-priced AFC team to reach the Super Bowl, even ahead of last year's representative, the Raiders. "It'll just be a shame if we don't make it," tackle Todd Wade says. "This

is the most talented team I'll ever play on."

The front office doesn't get a lot of credit, but the Dolphins never seem to lose their stars. The key people get signed. In free agency the imports are always better than the exports. This year, though, they outdid themselves. A team that had good personnel is now bursting with it.

Junior Seau, a Pro Bowl player for 12 of his 13 years in San Diego, is the new weakside linebacker. Thirty-four-year-old legends come cheap: He cost Miami a

FRESH FISH The Dolphins plan to use Seau in pass coverage and perhaps even as an edge rusher in the nickel package.

UNDER THE GUN

► In 2000 **BRIAN GRIESE** made the Pro Bowl with Denver. Two years later he was run out of town, all the way to Miami, where he was supposed to provide much-needed depth. When Jay Fiedler was injured last year, the Dolphins went 2-4 and missed the playoffs. Now Griese has been slowed by ligament damage to his left big toe.

HEINZ KLUETMEIER



late-round draft choice. Seau plays a spot that has a lot of coverage responsibilities, but he's coming off a bad ankle sprain last year. "Horrible," he says. "They shot it with painkiller on Saturday and on Sunday. It hurt even standing in the huddle." So, can he still get downfield? "Just watch," he says. And you might even see Seau do something he did best at USC and early on with the Chargers—line up as a down lineman in the nickel defense and rush the passer from the edge. "It's what got me into the NFL," he says.

Strong safety Sammy Knight, 27 years old and a Pro Bowl selection two years ago, was a terrific free-agent pickup. There isn't a scar on him. He's not that speedy, but he'll be playing closer to the line than he was in New Orleans. "This defense allows me to be more aggressive," he says, "which is delightful."

Almost overlooked was the acquisition of free-agent defensive tackle Jeff Zgonina, a classic run-stopper, late of the Rams. Every defense needs one; few have one. "Play the two-gap, stop the run—I've been doing that my whole career," he says.

The Dolphins also brought in a former Pro Bowl quarterback, Brian Griese, as Fiedler's backup. Now Griese is sidelined after injuring his toe in last Friday's preseason game. From the Redskins they snatched the guy who has been the star of training camp, wideout Derrius Thompson. He runs disciplined routes and tears the ball away from defensive backs. "It seems that every day he's grabbing one that nobody thinks he's going to get," center Tim Ruddy says of Thompson.

"I told my guys, 'Believe your eyes,' " offensive coordinator Norv Turner says. "You saw him. He is what you're watching."

Why did Steve Spurrier let him get away? "I wasn't his type of guy," Thompson says. "He was looking for something else, for those little tippy-toe receivers who run 4.4s. I do the dirty work. You've got to have blue-collar guys in your offense."

Thompson is the possession receiver that Miami has needed and never had in Oronde Gadsden, who was big and tough enough but undisciplined on his routes. Thompson's the perfect complement to downfield receiver Chris Chambers.

Yep, the Dolphins have it all, and if somehow they blow it again in December or January . . . well, they'll just have to open a new can of excuses. —P.Z.

ENEMY LINES

An opposing scout's view

CC The Dolphins are a team that's very hard to figure. They're as talented as any club in the league, but they're an emotional team, and sometimes that emotion works against them. When the wheels come off, they come off in a hurry. . . . You hear people say that they get out-toughed in big games, but I don't think it's that as much as that they make the wrong decisions. **Ricky Williams** is as tough as any back in football. **Jason Taylor** is as tough as they come, fighting the double team all game. **Zach Thomas** is a tough middle line-backer. . . . The defense has people who are among

"They're an emotional team, and sometimes that emotion works against them."

the best in the league. The line never gets out-manned. Maybe **Patrick Surtain** and **Sam Madison** slipped a little last year, but they're still one of the best sets of corners in the league. . . . **Junior Seau's** going to make some highlight plays, but I don't think he is what he once was. Overall, though, it's a good line-backing group. . . . People say their offensive line and their quarterbacking could be better. I say the line is O.K. **Jay Fiedler's** passes might not always look pretty, but he wins games, and his team believes in him. . . . This is the soundest team in the division.

FIEDLER



SCHEDULE

Sept. 7	HOUSTON
14	at N.Y. Jets
21	BUFFALO
28	Open date
Oct. 5	at N.Y. Giants
12	at Jacksonville
19	NEW ENGLAND
27	at San Diego (Mon.)
Nov. 2	INDIANAPOLIS
9	at Tennessee
16	BALTIMORE
23	WASHINGTON
27	at Dallas (Thurs.)
Dec. 7	at New England
15	PHILADELPHIA (Mon.)
21	at Buffalo
28	N.Y. JETS

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 15
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .516
Games against playoff teams: 6

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD: 9-7

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 2/26/15
DEFENSE T5/B/3

COACH: Dave Wannstedt;
fourth season with Miami
(71-73 in NFL)

RICKY WILLIAMS					
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.	
RB	2	383	1,853	4.8	
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs		
47	363	7.7	17		

JAY FIEDLER					
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.	%
QB	91	292	179	61.3	
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING		
2,024	14	9	85.2		

ROB KONRAD					
POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.	
FB	300	3	2	0.7	
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs		
34	233	6.9	3		

CHRIS CHAMBERS					
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs	
WR	117	52	734	3	

RANDY MCMICHAEL					
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs	
TE	131	39	485	4	

MARK DIXON					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
LT	6' 4"	295 lbs.	13	12	

JAMIE NAILS					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
LG	6' 6"	330 lbs.	14	14	

TIM RUDDY					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
C	6' 3"	295 lbs.	16	16	

TODD PERRY					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
RG	6' 5"	310 lbs.	16	16	

TODD WADE					
POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS	
RT	6' 8"	325 lbs.	16	16	

DERRIUS THOMPSON					
POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs	
WR	99	53	773	4	

DEFENSE			
RE	JASON TAYLOR	69 tackles	18½ sacks
RT	LARRY CHESTER	37 tackles	1½ sacks
LT	TIM BOWENS	36 tackles	0 sacks
LE	ADEWALE OGUNLEYE	45 tackles	9½ sacks
OLB	MORLON GREENWOOD	51 tackles	1 sack
MLB	ZACH THOMAS	156 tackles	½ sack
OLB	JUNIOR SEAU	84 tackles	1½ sacks
CB	SAM MADISON	34 tackles	3 int.
SS	SAMMY KNIGHT	107 tackles	5 int.
FS	BROCK MARION	93 tackles	5 int.
CB	PATRICK SURTAIN	58 tackles	6 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS			
PVR			
K	OLINDO MARE	190	42/43 XPs 24/31 FGs 114 pts.
PR	CHARLIE ROGERS	397	26 ret. 5.3 avg. 0 TDs
KR	CHARLIE ROGERS	397	64 ret. 20.0 avg. 1 TD
P	MARK ROYALS		69 punts 40.2 avg.

New acquisition PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 89)

AFC
EAST

4

NEW YORK Jets

A needy defense and an embattled front office look to a prized rookie for immediate relief

NOT MARK GASTINEAU, not Joe Klecko, not John Elliott, not Gerry Philbin, not Verlon Biggs. No Jets defensive lineman has been under as much scrutiny as rookie Dewayne Robertson has. Has anyone had his tackle and assist statistics—in the preseason yet—so carefully dissected?

Robertson, you see, represents two things: a hope for the future and a cover-up for the past. The future, the Jets hope, is many years as a pocket-crashing defensive tackle. The past is the Great Corporate Raid of early 2003, when three starters, plus the kicker and the NFL's fourth-leading kick returner last season, were swept up by other organizations working the free-agent market. The most serious loss, terrific young wideout Laveranues Coles to the Redskins, led to Robertson's arrival. Washington had to give the Jets its first-round draft pick for signing Coles. That gave New York the juice to trade up to the Bears' No. 4 spot and select Robertson, who was generally considered to be the best defensive lineman in the draft.

His greatness, the thinking went, would wipe out all the talk about how the Jets had lost Coles and the others through mismanagement. But if Robertson turns out to be ordinary, or something less, then fingers will be pointed for years.

UNDER THE GUN

► VINNY TESTAVERDE

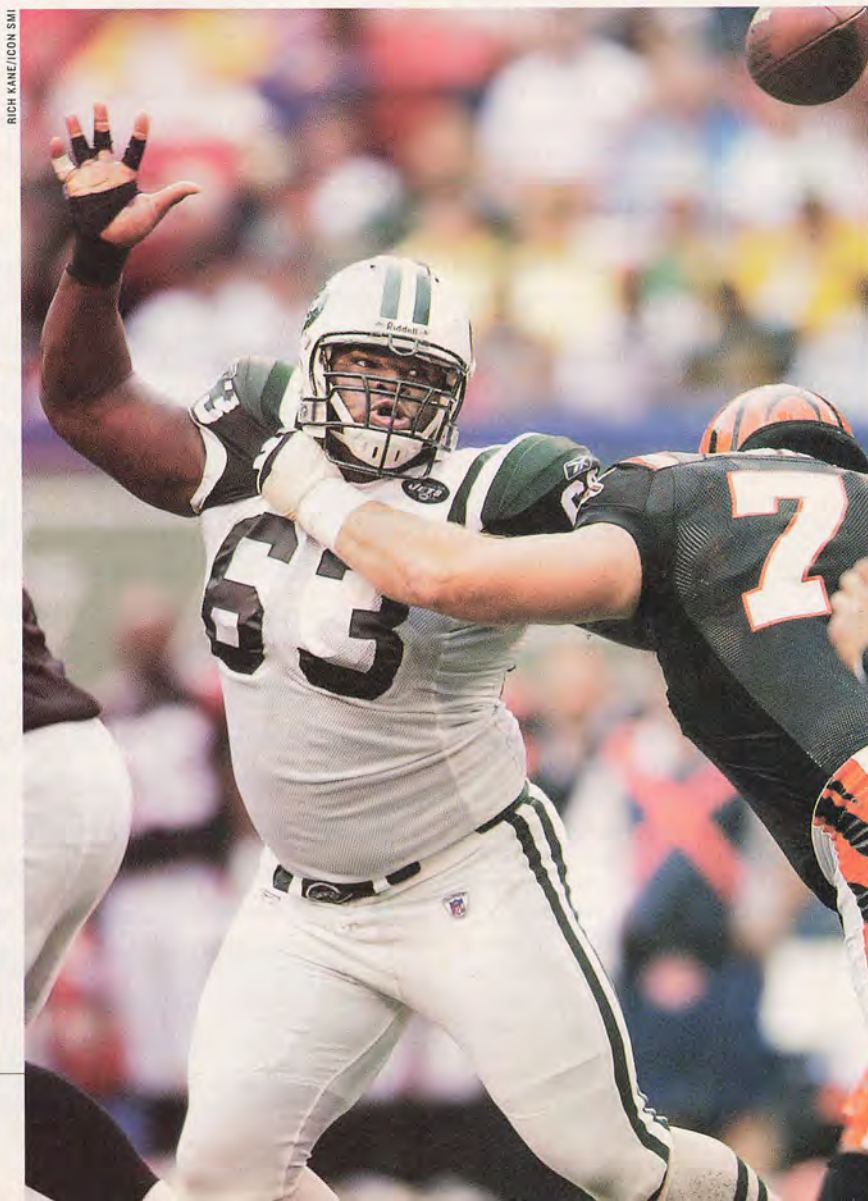
quarterbacked the Jets to the AFC Championship Game in 1998, but the 17-year veteran didn't expect to face the pressure he'll be under this fall as the replacement for injured starter Chad Pennington, who is expected to miss at least 12 weeks. Testaverde turns 40 in November, so don't look for miracles.

Robertson is a nice young man, modest, soft-spoken. When he talks, you have to strain to hear him. He looks like a giant who had a heavy object dropped on him, squashing his 317 pounds onto a 6' 1" frame, the classic size for a nosetackle. Except that he's not a nosetackle, a two-gapper, a block eater. He's supposed to be

an action guy, hitting the gap and breaking through and raising hell in the backfield.

The early going hasn't been that easy. In New York's preseason opener the Bucs

NO HOLDS BARRED Looking to get an edge on Robertson, opposing linemen are already doubling up and testing his skills.



double-teamed Robertson on his first NFL play ("I guess they'd been watching tape of his practices," Jets cornerback Ray Mickens quipped), and they continued to give him the treatment for the three series he was on the field. Tampa Bay showed him a bunch of tricks, passing him off from one lineman to another, setting him up and then blindsiding him. Robertson had no tackles or assists, but he took a low charge and got penetration and kept coming.

Since then he's seen all the other nuances of offensive line play, and he's learning. But can Robertson key a defense that must carry an even bigger share of the load, now that quarterback Chad Pennington is out at least 12 weeks with a fractured and dislocated left wrist? Chances are that Vinny Testaverde can keep the Jets in their share of low-scoring games, but with Pennington the offense could compete in shootouts. "I keep myself in shape," Testaverde says. "I'll be ready."

Nevertheless, he turns 40 in November, and history is loaded with Hall of Fame quarterbacks who faded badly after their 39th birthday. There are success stories, however. Warren Moon was effective in Seattle after hitting 40. Phil Simms turned 39 in November 1993 and had a good year on a playoff-bound Giants team. But don't forget that Pennington got his chance early last October after Testaverde couldn't cut it.

What makes his job even more difficult is that Testaverde takes over an offense that lost its top receiver, Coles, and one of its better linemen, right guard Randy Thomas, in free agency. Jets general manager Terry Bradway is tired of hearing all the blah blah blah about the wave of departures. "That's all people want to talk about," he says. "You know that last year we lost even more guys, eight of them, and we still won the division."

Yes, but most were guys the Jets cut or exposed in the expansion draft. To simplify, four things have to happen for the Jets to have a shot at repeating in the AFC East. Coles's replacement, former Charger Curtis Conway, has to be a reasonable facsimile of his predecessor. Running back Curtis Martin, who dragged his badly sprained left ankle through a painful 2002, has to regain his old zip. Robertson has to learn to beat the double team. And, of course, Testaverde has to find some life in a 39-year-old arm.

—P.Z.

ENEMY LINES

An opposing scout's view

People don't realize what a good job **Herm Edwards** did last year. When they were 2-5, no one in his right mind would have predicted they would make the playoffs. . . . The draft of 2000, a year before this administration took over and the draft in which they had four first-round choices, saved them. One of them, **John Abraham**, has been to the Pro Bowl, and **Chad Pennington** was at that level [before injuring his wrist]. . . . Herm's Tampa Bay connection hasn't paid off: Steve White and Damien Robinson were flunks; **Donnie Abraham** has worked out O.K., so that's one out of three. . . .

"They're going to have a desperate situation at the guard spots if Szott doesn't stay healthy."

Everyone likes **Dewayne Robertson**, but what bothers me is that he took less than 70 percent of the snaps at Kentucky last season. Is it a stamina thing, or did they just like to rotate people a lot? . . . They're going to have a desperate situation at the guard spots if **Dave Szott** doesn't stay healthy. The guy on the other side, **Brent Smith**, hasn't played in, what, two years? . . . They lost some really good players this year and the year before. They've got some good ones too—[Curtis] Martin, Abraham, Pennington—but sooner or later the talent drain gets you.

SZOTT



SCHEDULE

Sept. 4	at Washington (Thurs.)
14	MIAMI
21	at New England
28	DALLAS
Oct. 5	Open date
12	BUFFALO
19	at Houston
26	at Philadelphia
Nov. 2	N.Y. GIANTS
9	at Oakland
16	at Indianapolis
23	JACKSONVILLE
Dec. 1	TENNESSEE (Mon.)
7	at Buffalo
14	PITTSBURGH
20	NEW ENGLAND (Sat.)
28	at Miami

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 1
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .541
Games against playoff teams: 6

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics



2002 RECORD: 9-7

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 22/17/22
DEFENSE 18/21/24

COACH: Herman Edwards;
third season with New York
(19-13 in NFL)

CURTIS MARTIN

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	27	261	1,094	4.2
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
49	362	7.4	7	

VINNY TESTAVERDE

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	98	83	54	65.1
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
499	3	3	78.3	

JERALD SOWELL

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	396	1	0	0.0
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
9	85	9.4	1	

CURTIS CONWAY

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	66	57	852	5

ANTHONY BECHT

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	206	28	243	5

JASON FABINI

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 7"	304 lbs.	16	16

DAVE SZOTT

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 4"	289 lbs.	4	4

KEVIN MAWAE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 4"	289 lbs.	16	16

BRENT SMITH

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 5"	315 lbs.	0	0

KAREEM MCKENZIE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 6"	327 lbs.	16	16

WAYNE CHREBET

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	123	51	691	9

DEFENSE

RE	JOHN ABRAHAM	61 tackles	10 sacks
NT	JASON FERGUSON	63 tackles	3 sacks
LT	DEWAYNE ROBERTSON (R)	48 tackles	5 sacks
LE	SHAUN ELLIS	41 tackles	4 sacks
OLB	MO LEWIS	82 tackles	1/2 sack
MLB	MARVIN JONES	109 tackles	1 int.
OLB	SAM COWART	127 tackles	2 sacks
CB	AARON BEASLEY	66 tackles	2 int.
SS	SAM GARNES	67 tackles	2 int.
FS	JON MCGRAW	28 tackles	1 int.
CB	DONNIE ABRAHAM	53 tackles	4 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS PVR

K	DOUG BRIEN	239	5/7 XPs	5/6 FGs	20 pts.
PR	SANTANA MOSS	168	25 ret.	16.5 avg.	2 TDs
KR	ALBERT JOHNSON	378	12 ret.	27.5 avg.	0 TDs
P	DAN STRYZINSKI		64 punts	37.8 avg.	

New acquisition (R) Rookie (statistics for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 89)

AFC
WEST

1

KANSAS CITY Chiefs

Any improvement in the league's worst defense will send this offensive juggernaut to the top

HE WAS signed as a free agent to make an immediate impact, and linebacker Shawn Barber wasted no time. Four days into camp, Barber sneaked into linebackers coach Joe Vitt's dorm room at the Chiefs' Wisconsin-River Falls training site and affixed a battery-operated, red-eyed bat to the ceiling with a string. When Vitt returned to his room and opened the door, the creature flew past his face. "It scared the life out of me," Vitt said.

Vitt liked the gag so much that he promptly sprang it on offensive line coach Mike Solari, who played it on defensive backs coach Peter Giunta, who played it on defensive coordinator Greg Robinson. The punking went on until well after midnight. "The best part is that none of them wanted to be the last one to be had," Barber says. "No one wanted to be the butt of a joke."

Not after the 2002 season. Last year Kansas City's defense was laughable, and not simply because it finished last in total defense (390.5 yards per game), 31st against the pass (261.3 yards per game) and 28th in points allowed (24.9 points per game). The embarrassment was particularly painful given that the Chiefs' offense was scoring more often than Colin Farrell, averaging a league-best 29.2 points

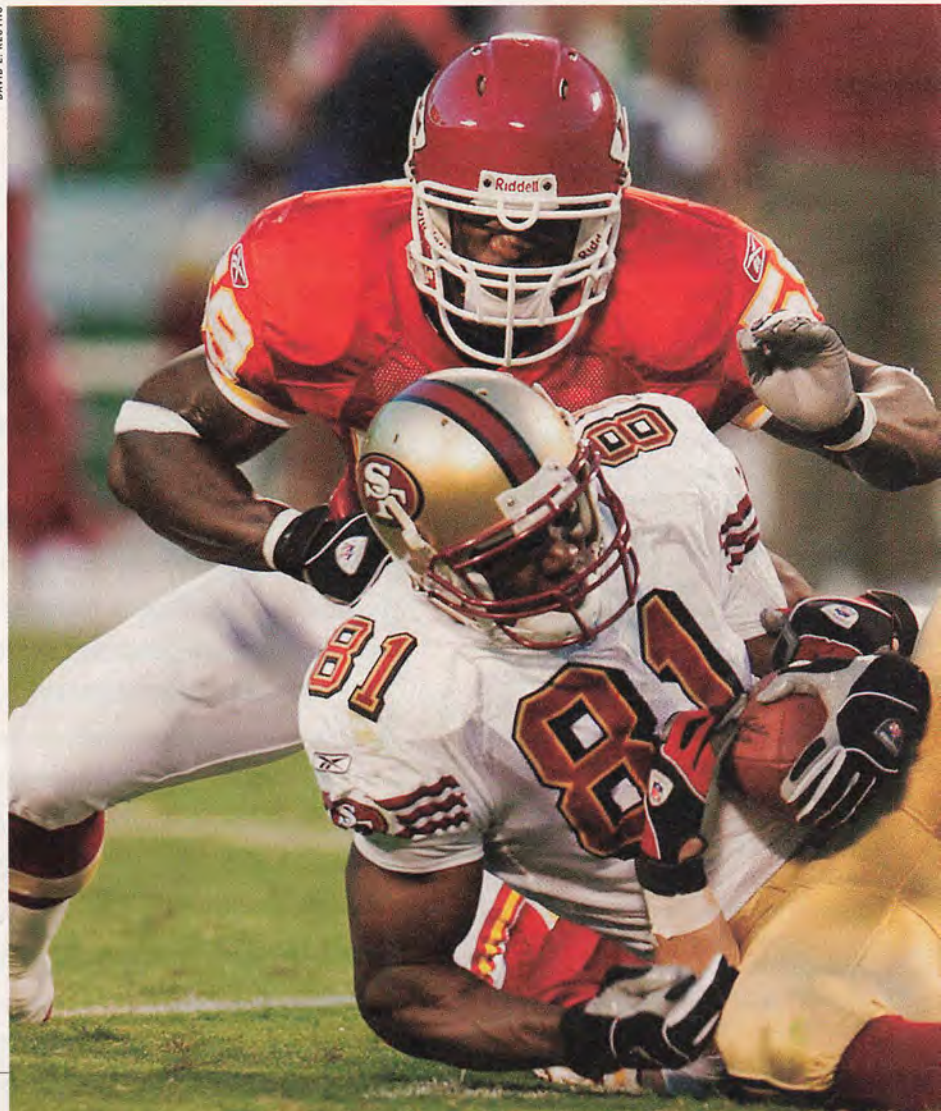
per game behind Priest Holmes, the NFL's most productive running back over the last two seasons. Kansas City scored at least 30 points eight times but lost four of those games. Even in their eight victories, the Chiefs allowed 20 points per game. Little surprise that Kansas City defenders were apologizing to the offense almost weekly.

"You get sick of giving up almost 40 points a game, week after week," says sixth-year defensive tackle Eric Hicks.

Injuries to key starters plus Robinson's

DOUBLE DUTY Signed as a free agent to solidify the linebacking corps, Barber has also kept the team loose off the field.

DAVID E. KLUTHO



UNDER THE GUN

► A year ago defensive tackle **RYAN SIMS**, the sixth pick in the '02 draft, held out for the preseason, then reported in lousy shape. In Week 6 he suffered a season-ending left elbow injury. Sims's rep took another hit when he was two weeks late for the off-season workout program. On a unit in need of playmakers, it's time for Sims to produce.

intricate game plans—which several starters found too complex—contributed to the unit's dreadful performance. Enter the 6' 2", 237-pound Barber, a fifth-year outside linebacker who brings athleticism and attitude to a defense that lacked both last year. After signing a seven-year, \$30 million free-agent deal following one season in Philadelphia (he played his first four years in Washington), Barber quickly made his presence felt in Kansas City. By the end of May's minicamps he had established himself as the defense's emotional leader because of his nonstop chatter and ball hawking. "[Barber] takes his position one step beyond," coach Dick Vermeil says. "He's a charismatic guy, has a great work ethic."

"Shawn makes plays every practice that no one was making here last year," says fellow outside linebacker Scott Fujita, who started nine games as a rookie in 2002. "Things feel different. It's a sea change."

Barber's signing was not the only defensive personnel change. Former Green Bay defensive end Vonnie Holliday signed a five-year, \$20 million deal to help shore up a pass rush that had only 34 sacks a year ago. Barber's arrival also means that linebacker Mike Maslowski, who led the Chiefs with 126 tackles in 2002 despite playing out of position on the outside, moves back to his natural spot in the middle. Meanwhile, free safety Jerome Woods has returned from the broken left leg he suffered in August '02.

Everyone from general manager Carl Peterson to the camp's cafeteria workers points out that the defense need only ascend to the middle of the NFL pack for the Chiefs to be Super Bowl contenders. Led by quarterback Trent Green and tight end Tony Gonzalez, Kansas City could score in bunches as long as Holmes returns to the form that made him an MVP candidate before being sidelined last December with tissue damage and deep bruising to his right hip. (He had off-season surgery and looked like his old self in the preseason.)

Should all that happen, Vermeil could end his third season in Kansas City just as he did his third in St. Louis: holding the Lombardi Trophy. If, however, Barber and the new-look defense play anything like last year's unit, the joke will be on them.

"Kennison was one of the biggest surprises. I thought he was done three years ago."

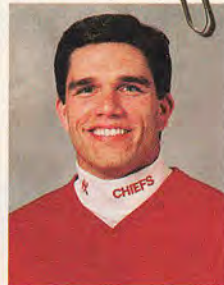
linebacking unit. **Mike Maslowski** played out of position on the outside last season; he was too slow to be effective there. I'm not sold on **Scott Fujita**. They love him, but he lacks quickness. . . . [Defensive coordinator] **Greg Robinson** likes to gamble, which means leaving his corners on an island. That's a problem when your best guy is **Dexter McCleon**, who doesn't have enough speed. . . . Don't buy into the hype about Vermeil always going to the playoffs in his third season. The only reason he did anything in St. Louis is that Kurt Warner fell into his lap.

ENEMY LINES

An opposing scout's view

FF The offense will score lots of points if **Priest Holmes** is 100 percent, but if he's lost even a half step, it'll be a different story. . . . **Trent Green** isn't a great athlete, but last year he looked comfortable in **Dick Vermeil's** system. His accuracy and pocket presence were excellent. . . . **Eddie Kennison** was one of the league's biggest surprises; he looked like he was done three years ago. . . . **Johnnie Morton** will have a better year playing at his usual [slot] receiver position. He looked lost last year. . . . **Shawn Barber's** a fast, smart veteran who will upgrade last year's terrible

GREEN



SCHEDULE

Sept. 7	SAN DIEGO
14	PITTSBURGH
21	at Houston
28	at Baltimore
Oct. 5	DENVER
12	at Green Bay
20	at Oakland (Mon.)
26	BUFFALO
Nov. 2	Open date
9	CLEVELAND
16	at Cincinnati
23	OAKLAND
30	at San Diego
Dec. 7	at Denver
14	DETROIT
20	at Minnesota (Sat.)
28	CHICAGO

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 25
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .475
Games against playoff teams: 5

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD: 8-8

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 3/11/4
DEFENSE 24/31/32

COACH: Dick Vermeil; third season with Kansas City (90-91 in NFL)

PRIEST HOLMES

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	1	313	1,615	5.2
REC	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
70	672	9.6	24	

TRENT GREEN

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	28	470	287	61.1
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
3,690	26	13	92.6	

TONY RICHARDSON

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	151	22	81	3.7
REC	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
18	125	6.9	3	

EDDIE KENNISON

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	113	53	906	2

TONY GONZALEZ

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	54	63	773	7

WILLIE ROAF

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 5"	315 lbs.	16	16

BRIAN WATERS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 3"	318 lbs.	16	16

CASEY WIEGMANN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 2"	285 lbs.	16	16

WILL SHIELDS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 3"	315 lbs.	16	16

JOHN TAIT

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 6"	323 lbs.	16	16

JOHNNIE MORTON

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	76	29	397	1

DEFENSE

RE	VONNIE HOLLIDAY	26 tackles	6 sacks
RT	JOHN BROWNING	39 tackles	7 sacks
LT	RYAN SIMS	6 tackles	0 sacks
LE	ERIC HICKS	54 tackles	9 sacks
OLB	SCOTT FUJITA	55 tackles	1 sack
MLB	MIKE MASLOWSKI	126 tackles	3 int.
OLB	SHAWN BARBER	91 tackles	2 int.
CB	WILLIAM BARTTEE	77 tackles	0 int.
SS	GREG WESLEY	64 tackles	6 int.
FS	JEROME WOODS*	87 tackles	3 int.
CB	ERIC WARFIELD	64 tackles	4 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS

PVR	K	MORTEN ANDERSEN	182	51/51 XPs	22/26 FGs	117 pts.
PVR	PR	DANTE HALL	127	29 ret.	13.4 avg.	2 TDs
PVR	KR	DANTE HALL	127	57 ret.	23.8 avg.	1 TD
PVR	P	JASON BAKER		55 punts	38.8 avg.	

New acquisition PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 89) *2001 stats

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AFC
WEST

2

OAKLAND

Raiders

One of the NFL's oldest teams will rely on three of its youngest players for another crack at glory

CHARLES WOODSON and Tory James each hobbled into Qualcomm Stadium with a metal plate in his leg and walked off the field with a knot in his stomach. Needless to say, last Jan. 26 was a not-so-Super Sunday for the Raiders' cornerbacks, who learned the hard way that trying to cover the Buccaneers' wideouts with broken fibulas is futile. "I had that early interception," Woodson recalls, "and I was thinking, MVP, win the game, all that good stuff. But as the game dragged on, it was like one long, bad dream that never seemed to end."

Oakland's crushing 48-21 loss to the Bucs and former Raiders coach Jon Gruden can be explained by many factors—Tampa's edge in team speed; superior coaching by Gruden against his former assistant Bill Callahan; a dreadful performance by MVP quarterback Rich Gannon; the suspension of All-Pro center Barret Robbins after he went on a drinking binge, brought on by his bipolar disorder—but its struggling secondary was a primary culprit. It certainly didn't help that Phillip Buchanon, the Raiders' electrifying cover corner, watched helplessly from the sideline, his rookie season having ended after he broke his left wrist in Week 7.

Now, as Callahan attempts to coax one more title run from his long-in-the-tooth

squad (the current roster, average age 28.5, is the third oldest in the NFL), a trio of young cornerbacks could be the key. With James having bolted to the Bengals as a free agent, Woodson, 26, and Buchanon, 22, form a spectacular starting tandem. Rookie Nnamdi Asomugha, a first-round draft pick from Cal, will likely be the nick-

elback, with holdover Terrance Shaw also in the mix. "I think it's going to start with our defense—and it's got to start with our corners," says 38-year-old free safety Rod

PAYBACK TIME Charles Woodson, who has been injured in each of the last two seasons, is ready to restore his reputation.

MARCIO JOSE SANCHEZ/AP



UNDER THE GUN

► Since his disappearing act at Super Bowl XXXVII, center **BARRET ROBBINS** has gone through rehab for alcohol abuse and sought treatment for bipolar disorder. Now the All-Pro is trying to regain his starting job, which was ceded to Adam Treu. A 30-pound weight gain, the result of his medication and off-season knee surgery, won't make that easy.

Woodson (no relation to Charles), who tied for the NFL lead in interceptions last season with eight.

While the selection of the big (6' 3", 215 pounds), speedy Asomugha with the 31st pick might have been confusing to some—including commissioner Paul Tagliabue, who transposed and butchered Asomugha's name at the podium on draft day—Charles Woodson knew the deal: Since he's set to make \$2.4 million in the final season of the six-year contract he signed as a rookie, Woodson's future in Oakland may depend on how, and how much, he plays in 2003. "I feel like I'm starting over," says the former Heisman winner, whose streak of four consecutive Pro Bowl appearances ended last season.

Slowed by turf toe throughout much of 2001, the 6' 1", 205-pound Woodson began last season with a flourish, forcing three fumbles and intercepting a pass in the Raiders' first two games. But he broke his right humerus bone during Oakland's 30-17 victory over the Steelers in Week 2 and had to sit out the next five games. Shortly after his return he cracked his right fibula, missing a total of three games before returning to play with the plate in his leg.

Woodson understands that by sucking it up for his team and then getting burned repeatedly in the Super Bowl, he may have damaged his reputation as a star. Dolphins cornerback Patrick Surtain recently told *The Miami Herald* that Woodson was the NFL's most overhyped player, and several of his peers questioned Woodson about his decision to play hurt. Shortly after the Super Bowl one prominent player approached him and said, "Yo, I wouldn't have done that."

Buchanon, an explosive player who returned an interception for a touchdown and busted a punt return for a score during his abbreviated rookie year, relishes the notion of playing opposite a revived Woodson. "It's not going to be a pretty sight for offensive coordinators," says Buchanon, a first-round pick from Miami in 2002. "A lot of people are going to try me, and I can't wait."

Woodson, too, remains confident. Asked about the possibility of forming one of the alltime cornerback combinations with Buchanon, he says, "I feel any tandem I'm part of has a chance to be one of the best."

The Raiders would like nothing more than for their brash corners to back up their words.

"People talk about Champ Bailey, but Buchanon is the [league's] top young talent."

ENEMY LINES

An opposing scout's view

This is still a very good team, and it could be better defensively this year because **Phillip Buchanon** is back from a broken wrist—the secondary suffered last year when he went down. People talk about Champ Bailey, but Buchanon is the league's top young talent back there. He has great quickness, lateral movement, footwork and coverage skills. . . . When **Charles Woodson** is healthy, he's one of the best, but he needs to stop playing smash-mouth like he did in college and pick his spots. . . . I really like **Napoleon Harris**. If you watched him closely last year, he made a lot of plays

HARRIS



SCHEDULE

Sept.	7	at Tennessee
14		CINCINNATI
22		at Denver (Mon.)
28		SAN DIEGO
Oct.	5	at Chicago
12		at Cleveland
20		KANSAS CITY (Mon.)
26		Open date
Nov.	2	at Detroit
9		N.Y. JETS
16		MINNESOTA
23		at Kansas City
30		DENVER
Dec.	7	at Pittsburgh
14		BALTIMORE
22		GREEN BAY (Mon.)
28		at San Diego

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 20
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .482
Games against playoff teams: 5

because he's instinctive. As he starts to understand the game better, watch out. . . . Every club looks for a special teams guy like **Eric Johnson**. He wreaks havoc and is always around the ball. . . . **Rich Gannon** takes three- and five-step drops, reads the defense on the way back and delivers quickly, so there's no chance he'll get sacked. . . . **Jerry Rice** and **Tim Brown** are Hall of Famers, but **Jerry Porter** is a great young talent, and I'd hate to see them use the older guys at his expense. . . . **Lincoln Kennedy** is their best offensive lineman. He has the ability to dominate his opponent.

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD: 11-5

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 19/11
DEFENSE 3/23/11

COACH: Bill Callahan;
second season with
Oakland (11-5 in NFL)

CHARLIE GARNER

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	34	182	962	5.3
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
91	941	10.3	11	

RICH GANNON

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	6	618	418	67.6
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
4,689	26	10	97.3	

TIM BROWN

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	70	81	930	2

DOUG JOLLEY

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	195	32	409	2

BARRY SIMS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 5"	300 lbs.	15	15

FRANK MIDDLETON

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 4"	330 lbs.	16	16

ADAM TREU

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 5"	300 lbs.	16	0

MO COLLINS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 4"	325 lbs.	10	10

LINCOLN KENNEDY

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 6"	335 lbs.	15	15

JERRY PORTER

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	103	51	688	9

JERRY RICE

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	52	92	1,211	7

DEFENSE

RE	DELAWARE GRANT	26 tackles	3 sacks
RT	JOHN PARRELLA	44 tackles	1 sack
LT	DANA STUBBLEFIELD	38 tackles	3 sacks
LE	TYLER BRAYTON (R)	66 tackles	7 sacks
OLB	BILL ROMANOWSKI	91 tackles	4 sacks
MLB	NAPOLION HARRIS	81 tackles	½ sack
OLB	ERIC BARTON	124 tackles	6 sacks
CB	PHILLIP BUCHANON	21 tackles	2 int.
SS	DERRICK GIBSON	64 tackles	0 int.
FS	ROD WOODSON	82 tackles	8 int.
CB	CHARLES WOODSON	37 tackles	1 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS PVR

K	SEBASTIAN JANIKOWSKI	177	50/50 XP's	26/33 FG's	128 pts.
PR	PHILLIP BUCHANON	450	15 ret.	11.9 avg.	1 TD
KR	RONNEY JENKINS	407	40 ret.	23.1 avg.	0 TDs
P	SHANE LECHLER		53 punts	42.5 avg.	

New acquisition (R) Rookie (statistics for final college year) PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 89)

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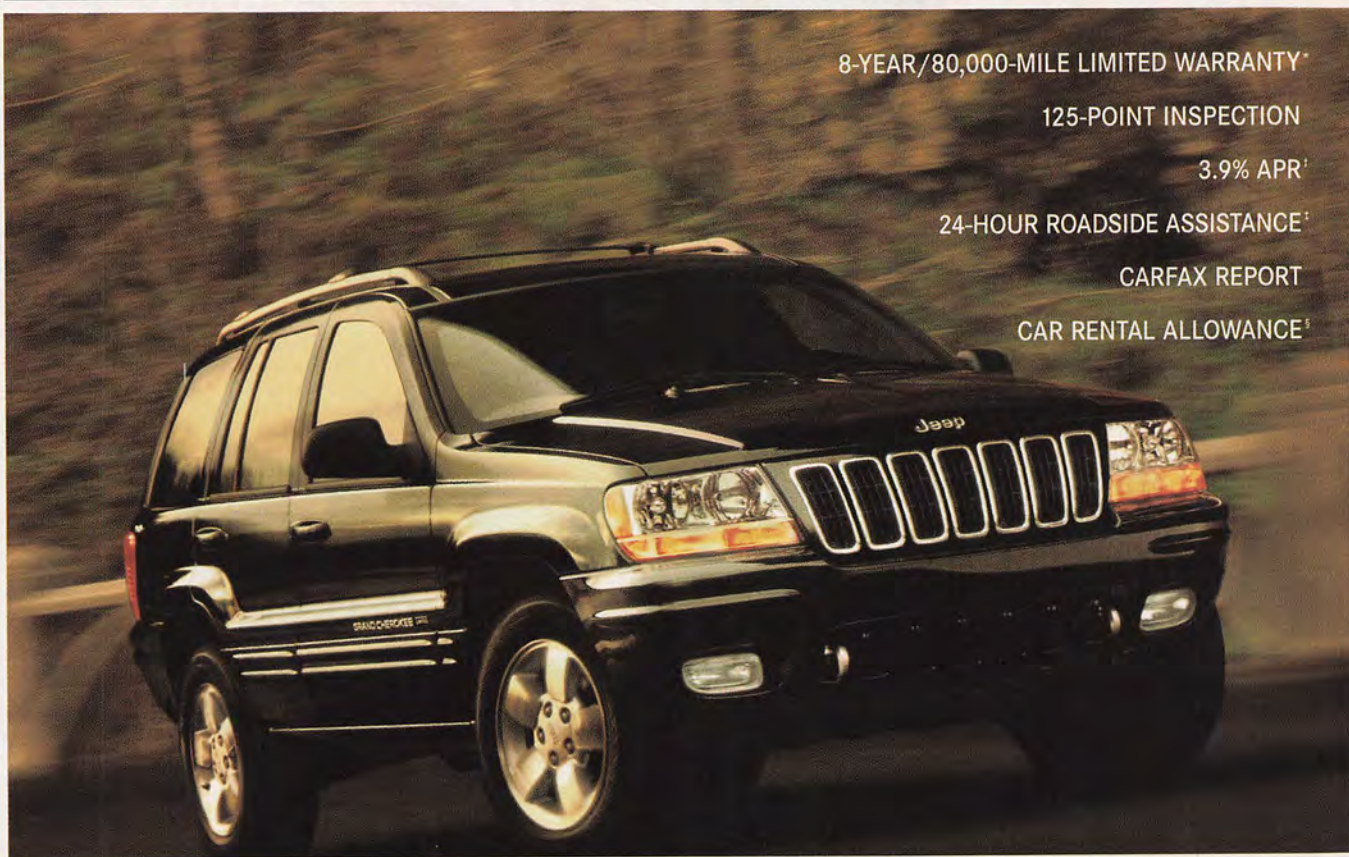
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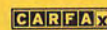


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AFC
WEST

3

DENVER

Broncos

The team's future and Jake Plummer's career hinge on how he performs in a talented lineup

FOR THE past four years the question about Jake Plummer has been, Is he really that bad, or is quarterbacking the bungling Cardinals an excuse for even the most scatter-armed passer? Last March, having missed the playoffs for the third time in four seasons, Broncos coach Mike Shanahan gambled on the latter. In cutting the inconsistent Brian Griese and signing the free agent Plummer to a seven-year, \$40 million contract, Shanahan made a move he believes can return his talented team to the elite status it enjoyed while winning back-to-back Super Bowls in 1997 and '98.

"There are a lot of people in football, including some guys I respect, who've told me, 'Hey, you're crazy,'" Shanahan says. "They're not high on Jake, but I'm convinced he'll play at a high level here."

Think *mile high*, which is the standard that was established by Shanahan and John Elway, who has been retired for five years. That would be a drastic change for Plummer, who, at 28, has already experienced a career's worth of low moments. He had four stellar years at Arizona State, and the 49ers' Bill Walsh compared him with Joe Montana. A second-round pick by the Cardinals in 1997, Plummer was spectacular in his second season, defeating the Cowboys in a wild-card game to give the fran-

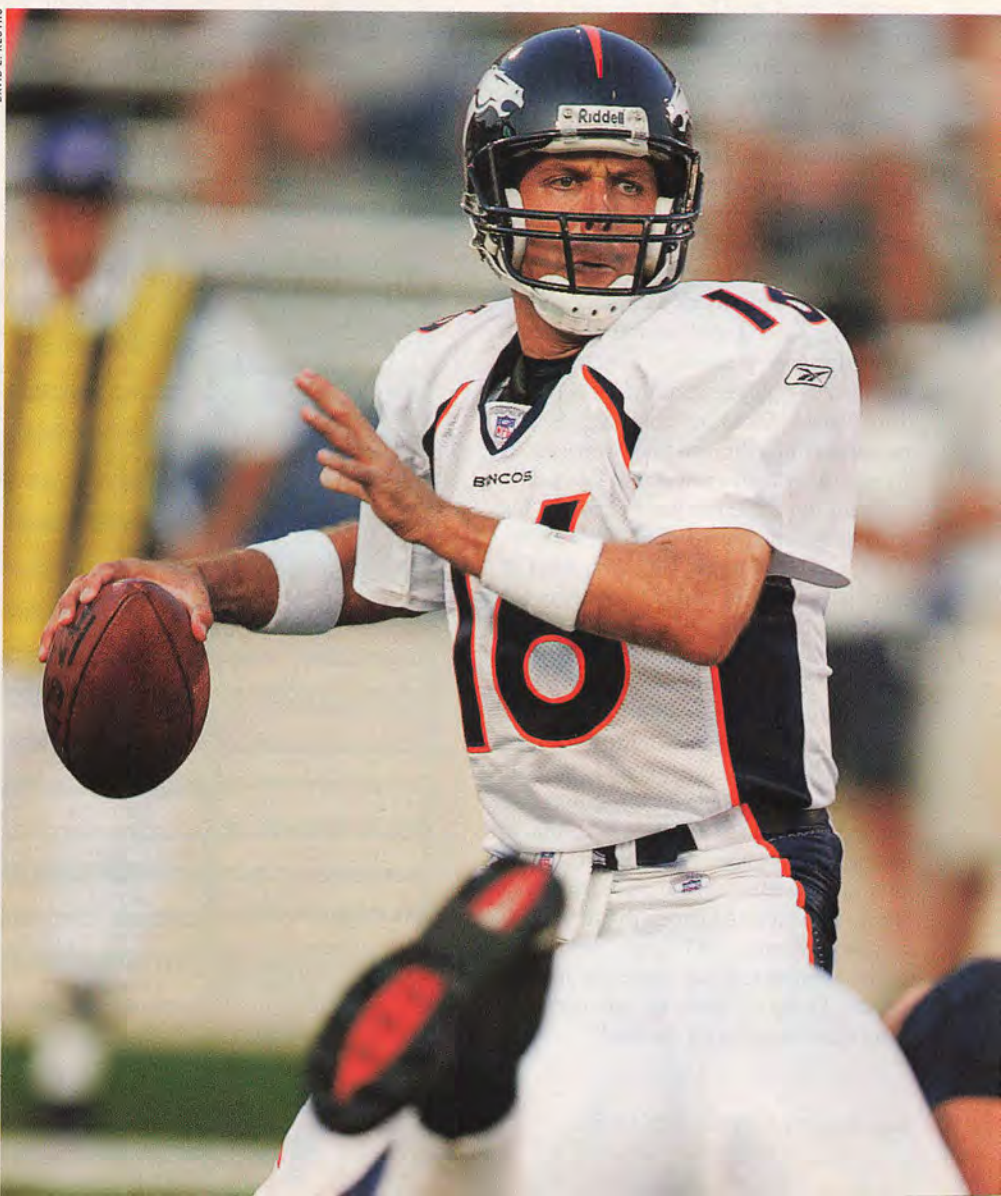
chise its first postseason victory in 51 years. From then on his Arizona experience was mostly miserable: four consecutive losing seasons, including one in which Plummer threw 24 interceptions and only nine TDs.

Still, thanks to Plummer's scrambling ability and penchant for comebacks—in six seasons he directed 21 game-winning

drives in the fourth quarter or overtime—Denver fans were intrigued by him. Last December, as the Broncos were beating the Cardinals 37-7 to close out a 9-7 sea-

PET PROJECT Shanahan wants Plummer, who has directed 21 come-from-behind wins as a pro, to be more consistent.

DAVID E. KUTHO



UNDER THE GUN

► Two years ago right cornerback **DELTHA O'NEAL** intercepted nine passes and went to the Pro Bowl. Last season he was moved to the left side and, despite five interceptions, lost his starting job and much of his confidence. To revive O'Neal's career, new defensive coordinator Larry Coyer switched him back to right corner, where he's more comfortable.

son, some of the spectators at Invesco Field at Mile High made their feelings known. "They were chanting, 'We want Jake!'" Plummer said after signing with the Broncos. "And I was thinking, I want you."

Plummer had plenty of reasons for wanting them. Shanahan, despite his failure to develop Griese into a worthy successor to Elway, remains the game's top quarterback guru, and the stable of skill players he has assembled helped Denver rank third in the NFL in offense last season. Halfback Clinton Portis, a second-year speedster, gained 1,508 yards to earn NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year honors—an award won two years earlier by Mike Anderson, who is the Broncos' starting fullback. Crafty veterans Rod Smith and Ed McCaffrey have been one of the league's best receiving tandems for six years, and downfield threat Ashley Lelie, a first-round pick in 2002, appears on the verge of stardom. Oh, there's also future Hall of Famer Shannon Sharpe, who has more career catches (753) and receiving yards (9,290) than any other tight end in NFL history. Can Plummer, whose poor career numbers (90 touchdowns, 114 interceptions and a 69.0 passer rating) point to impatience and poor decision-making, parlay these riches into a career revival?

Already, most Denver players have been won over by Plummer's outgoing, unpretentious manner, a stark contrast to Griese's aloof, detached persona. "I like Brian, but he wasn't as player-friendly," says center Tom Nalen. "Jake is one of the guys. You can make fun of him and not worry about it because he'll give you crap right back."

So far Plummer has gotten grief for his undistinguished wardrobe ("He's a Gap, Abercrombie & Fitch, Old Navy kind of guy," says Sharpe) and his proclivity for cackling. Nalen describes him as yappy, and backup quarterback Steve Beuerlein says, "Sometimes you want to slap him around and tell him to shut up."

If Plummer doesn't win in Denver, no one will say that the sorry state of the Cardinals was responsible for his disappointing performance. "We'll see who was to blame," Sharpe says. "He's removed from that now, so there are no more excuses. I like to think it was Arizona that was causing his problems, but I'm not going to get on a soapbox and say we've got Johnny Unitas. He has to show us, and everyone else, when he steps on the field." —M.S.

ENEMY LINES

An opposing scout's view

CC This team has a lot of talent, especially on defense. **Al Wilson** is underrated—he gets to the ball and delivers big open-field hits. They have three four-down linebackers in **Wilson**, **Ian Gold** and **John Mobley**. . . I'm not high on **Daryl Gardener**; he's a name, but he doesn't produce. **Trevor Pryce** is good, but they'll miss Montae Reagor, who came hard on every play. . . **Deltha O'Neal** could be special; he's a solid cover guy who makes plays. I love **Kenoy Kennedy**; you can suspend him, fine him, and he still blows people up. . . Bringing in **Jake Plummer** was a good move. He's

"I love Kenoy Kennedy. You can suspend him, fine him, and he still blows people up."

got the ability to be a Jeff Garcia type, who can run and throw down the field. . . **Rod Smith** is sneaky fast, and **Ed McCaffrey** finds separation. I like **Ashley Lelie**—he runs good routes, has the speed to get vertical and has the size to catch the fade or deep out. He needs to work on his blocking. . . Putting **Mike Anderson** at fullback was smart. He can open holes, and when you put him in as a split back and run misdirection plays—watch out. . . No one on the offensive line stands out. They're well coached, and they work as a unit. Even their cut blocks are timed.

WILSON



SCHEDULE

Sept. 7	at Cincinnati
14	at San Diego
22	OAKLAND (Mon.)
28	DETROIT
Oct. 5	at Kansas City
12	PITTSBURGH
19	at Minnesota
26	at Baltimore
Nov. 3	NEW ENGLAND (Mon.)
9	Open date
16	SAN DIEGO
23	CHICAGO
30	at Oakland
Dec. 7	KANSAS CITY
14	CLEVELAND
21	at Indianapolis
28	at Green Bay

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 18
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .494
Games against playoff teams: 6

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD: 9-7

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 5/8/3
DEFENSE 4/17/6

COACH: Mike Shanahan;
ninth season with Denver
(89-59 in NFL)

CLINTON PORTIS

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	5	273	1,508	5.5
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
33	364	11.0	17	

JAKE PLUMMER

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	61	530	284	53.6
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
2,972	18	20	65.7	

MIKE ANDERSON

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	111	84	386	4.6
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
18	167	9.3	4	

ROD SMITH

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	49	89	1,027	5

SHANNON SHARPE

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	129	61	686	3

EPHRAIM SALAAM

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 7"	295 lbs.	16	16

BEN HAMILTON

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 4"	283 lbs.	16	16

TOM NALEN

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 3"	286 lbs.	7	7

DAN NEIL

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 2"	285 lbs.	16	16

MATT LEPSIS

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 4"	290 lbs.	16	15

ED MCCAFFREY

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	86	69	903	2

DEFENSE

RE	BERTRAND BERRY	12 tackles	6½ sacks
RT	DARYL GARDENER	52 tackles	4 sacks
LT	DORSETT DAVIS	0 tackles	0 sacks
LE	TREVOR PRYCE	46 tackles	9 sacks
OLB	JOHN MOBLEY	97 tackles	1 sack
MLB	AL WILSON	132 tackles	5 sacks
OLB	IAN GOLD	99 tackles	6½ sacks
CB	DELTA O'NEAL	69 tackles	5 int.
SS	KENY KENNEDY	67 tackles	0 int.
FS	SAM BRANDON	17 tackles	0 int.
CB	LENNY WALLS	0 tackles	0 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS PVR

K	JASON ELAM	173	42/43 XPs	26/36 FGs	120 pts.
PR	DELTA O'NEAL	446	30 ret	8.4 avg.	0 TDs
KR	REUBEN DROUGHS	356	20 ret	25.8 avg.	0 TDs
P	MICAH KNORR		24 punts	37.8 avg.	

New acquisition PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 89)

move to the top



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AFC
WEST

4

SAN DIEGO

Chargers

The coach is conservative, but all systems are go for David Boston and a newly energized offense

EARLY LAST March, San Diego's star running back, LaDainian Tomlinson, sat at a sushi bar trying to persuade prized free-agent wideout David Boston to sign with the Chargers. The bar was at Seau's, a Mission Valley restaurant that is owned by future Hall of Fame linebacker Junior Seau, though the proprietor, perhaps appropriately, was nowhere to be found.

"Hey, man, I need a big-time receiver," Tomlinson said to Boston. "Drew [Brees] needs a big-time receiver."

"Cool," Boston replied. "I need a big-time running back!"

The next day Boston, who led the NFL in receiving yards in 2001 with the Cardinals, canceled a planned visit to Baltimore and signed a seven-year, \$47 million contract with the Chargers. That deal, along with the trade of the 34-year-old Seau, who is probably the most popular player in franchise history, to the Dolphins and the release of strong safety Rodney Harrison—long the Robin to Seau's Batman—sent a clear message to Chargers fans: Get ready for some electricity, because San Diego is going to be an offense-driven team. "There are going to be games when we'll need 40 points to win," says Brees, who is entering his second season as the starter. "With all our weapons, we're capable of doing that."

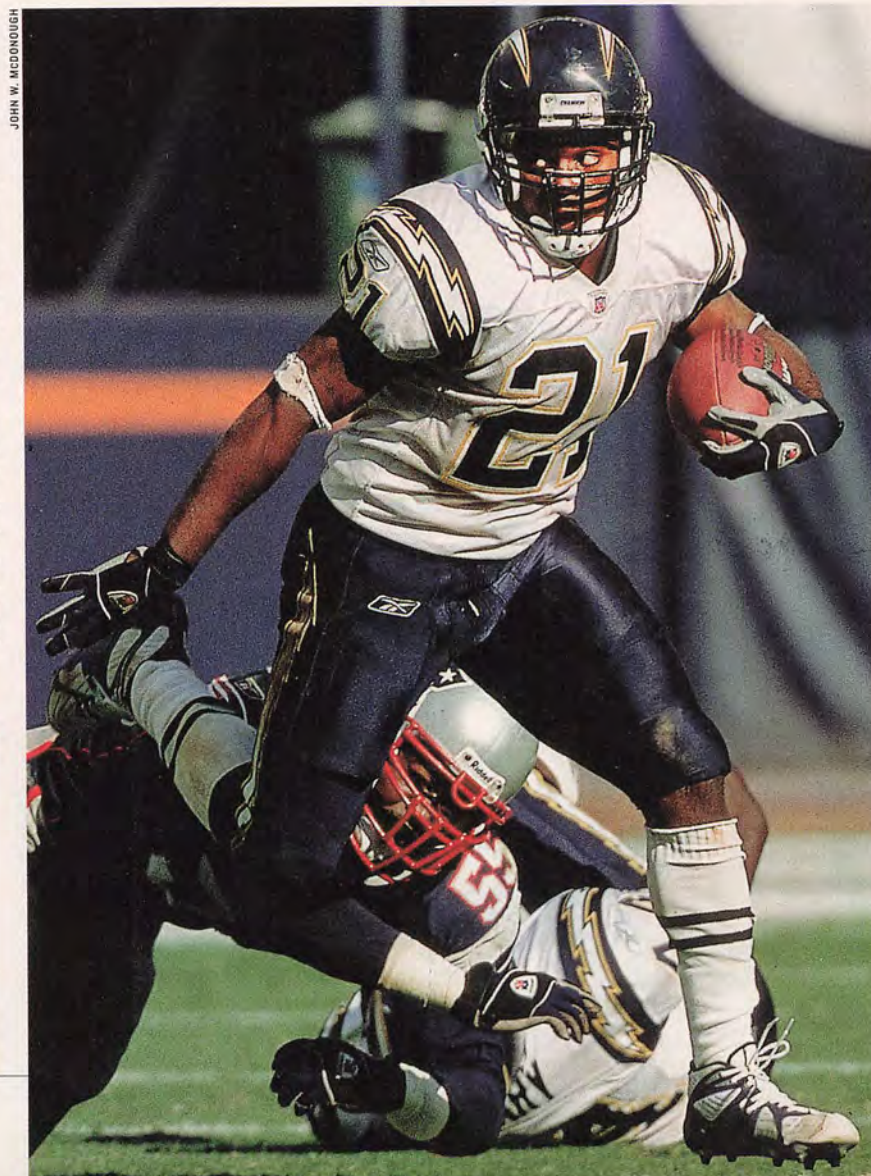
Such potency would seem incompatible with Marty Ball, the name given to the control-the-clock approach that usually characterizes coach Marty Schottenheimer's teams. But as tempted as he might be to hand the ball to the quick, physical Tomlinson on every play, Schottenheimer knows Boston's skills are too enticing to ignore.

At 6' 2" and 245 pounds, and with bulging biceps like Popeye's, Boston caused double takes the first time he stepped onto the Chargers' practice field.

LOOK OUT Tomlinson, who ran for 1,683 yards last year, may be even tougher to stop now that the passing game is better.

UNDER THE GUN

► He has an Ivy League diploma, a Hummer with monogrammed floor panels and one of the coolest nicknames (Dat Dude) in the NFL. But Columbia grad **MARCELLUS WILEY** also has a big contract, and after having just six sacks in an injury-plagued '02, the seventh-year pass-rush specialist is being counted on to return to Pro Bowl form.





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Blessed with speed, explosiveness and fabulous footwork, Boston was taken with the eighth pick in the draft by the Cardinals in 1999. He racked up 1,156 receiving yards in his second season and 1,598 in his third year before trouble set in. First came an off-season arrest for driving under the influence (he pleaded no contest to two DUI charges), and then Boston tore a tendon in his right knee, which limited him to eight games and 32 receptions in 2002.

When the Cardinals elected not to resign Boston following last season, the Chargers were standing by ready to recruit him. "I made my bed in Arizona, and I was going to lie in it," Boston says. "But as soon as they didn't name me their franchise player, I knew they didn't want to win. I had a chance to pick what I wanted in a team, and the first thing was a strong running game."

With 2,919 rushing yards in his two seasons, including a franchise-record 1,683 in 2002, Tomlinson was an obvious attraction. "He has an opportunity to become one of the preeminent backs in NFL history," Schottenheimer says. "He reminds me a lot of Walter." As in Walter Payton. No pressure there.

To help Tomlinson fulfill those expectations, the Chargers signed punishing fullback Lorenzo Neal, a blocker so gifted that he made last year's Pro Bowl as a member of the Bengals. Then again, you won't hear many Bengals jokes in San Diego. Having gone seven years without a winning season—only five fewer than the Bengals—the Chargers have the second-longest such streak in the NFL.

Last year the Chargers started 5-1 and were 8-4 before dropping their final four games. Then, in April the team lost general manager John Butler to lung cancer. With stadium issues raising doubts about whether the team will remain in San Diego, this franchise can use some good news.

It's not lost upon Boston, Tomlinson and Brees that they have a chance to make more than a short-term splash. All are 25 or younger, and each is from Texas—leading to the inevitable comparisons with the original Triplets, Michael Irvin, Emmitt Smith and Troy Aikman, who were the foundation of the Cowboys' success. "With David here, we think we can be a new version of the Triplets," Tomlinson says. "I'm glad to have him." — M.S.

ENEMY LINES

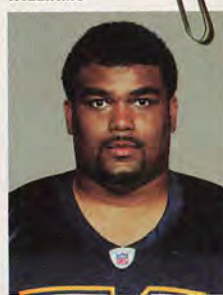
An opposing scout's view

They could be scary good offensively, but I think they'll struggle on defense. There are lots of question marks when a team loses Junior Seau and Rodney Harrison. **Marcellus Wiley** has been trying to become a leader, but that's hard to do when you're hurt, as he was during camp. **Jamal Williams** is another big-time player with a nasty edge, but he's also trying to rebound from injuries. . . . The linebackers will play within the system better than Junior did, but they're not playmakers. **Donnie Edwards** is a good athlete, but is he a game-changer? I don't think so. . . . **Quentin Jammer**

"Donnie Edwards is a good athlete, but is he a game-changer? I don't think so."

hasn't learned to play in the NFL. His last name epitomizes what he did in college—he'd backpedal, jam a guy and run with him. In the NFL you've got to cover. . . . **David Boston** and **Lorenzo Neal** will help that offense go. **Drew Brees** won't dominate on his own, but he can make plays. . . . They had to get Boston, because nobody else out wide makes you nervous; I'm not going to lose sleep over **Reche Caldwell**. If they ever play [first-year man] **Terry Charles**, though, watch out. . . . The line doesn't have quickness, but it'll mash you and create lanes for Tomlinson.

WILLIAMS



SCHEDULE

Sept. 7	at Kansas City
14	DENVER
21	BALTIMORE
28	at Oakland
Oct. 5	at Jacksonville
12	Open date
19	at Cleveland
27	MIAMI (Mon.)
Nov. 2	at Chicago
9	MINNESOTA
16	at Denver
23	CINCINNATI
30	KANSAS CITY
Dec. 7	at Detroit
14	GREEN BAY
21	at Pittsburgh
28	OAKLAND

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL rank: 19
Opponents' 2002 winning percentage: .486
Games against playoff teams: 5

PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP with 2002 statistics

2002 RECORD 8-8

NFL RANK (rush/pass/total):
OFFENSE 8/22/16
DEFENSE 11/32/30

COACH: Marty Schottenheimer;
second season with San
Diego (158-104-1 in NFL)

LADAINIAN TOMLINSON

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
RB	3	372	1,683	4.5
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
79	489	6.2	15	

DREW BREES

POS.	PVR	ATT.	COMP.	%
QB	35	526	320	60.8
YARDS	TDs	INT.	RATING	
3,284	17	16	76.9	

LORENZO NEAL

POS.	PVR	ATT.	YARDS	AVG.
FB	280	9	31	3.4
REC.	YARDS	AVG.	TDs	
21	133	6.3	1	

DAVID BOSTON

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	57	32	512	1

STEPHEN ALEXANDER

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
TE	134	45	510	1

DAMION MCINTOSH

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LT	6' 4"	325 lbs.	10	10

TONIU FONOTI

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
LG	6' 4"	349 lbs.	15	14

JASON BALL

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
C	6' 2"	301 lbs.	16	13

SOLOMON PAGE

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RG	6' 5"	325 lbs.	15	15

VAUGHN PARKER

POS.	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	GMS.	STARTS
RT	6' 3"	300 lbs.	12	12

RECHE CALDWELL

POS.	PVR	REC.	YARDS	TDs
WR	165	22	208	3

DEFENSE

RE	RAYLEE JOHNSON	40 tackles	6½ sacks
RT	JASON FISK	38 tackles	3 sacks
LT	JAMAL WILLIAMS	24 tackles	2½ sacks
LE	MARCELLUS WILEY	36 tackles	6 sacks
OLB	BEN LEBER	49 tackles	5 sacks
MLB	DONNIE EDWARDS	129 tackles	5 int.
OLB	ZEKE MORENO	32 tackles	1 int.
CB	TAY CODY	4 tackles	0 int.
SS	VERNON FOX	23 tackles	1 int.
FS	KWAMIE LASSITER	88 tackles	2 int.
CB	QUENTIN JAMMER	64 tackles	0 int.

SPECIAL TEAMS PVR

K	STEVE CHRISTIE	205	35/36 XPs	18/26 FGs	89 pts.
PR	TIM DWIGHT	228	19 ret.	122 avg.	0 TDs
KR	RECHE CALDWELL	165	9 ret.	24.4 avg.	0 TDs
P	DARREN BENNETT		87 punts	40.7 avg.	

New acquisition PVR: Player Value Ranking (explanation on page 89)



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DODGE PRESENTS Parents' Guide To Youth Sports

The Gender-Line Shift Shouldn't Cause A Rift

BY RICK WOLFF

In 2002, a female wrestler from Wirt County, W.V., made it all the way to the high school *boys'* state championship match. On the flip side, a male athlete in Massachusetts earned headlines recently by starring for his high school's field hockey team, and another, in Washington D.C., played girls' lacrosse because his school didn't have a boys' program.

According to the National Federation of State High School Associations, 2,870 girls played prep football in the 2001-02 school year, and 1,141 were on baseball teams. Similarly, about 2,200 boys played traditionally female sports in 2002.

More than ever before, girls and boys are sharing high school ball fields, courts and ice rinks. These athletes aren't necessarily trying to become "pioneers" for their genders. They just want to play a sport they enjoy. And while most parents and young athletes themselves have no qualms about boys and girls playing on the same teams when the kids are younger than 11 or 12, it often becomes an issue for parents when gender lines are blurred on the more competitive high school varsity levels.

But it shouldn't be cause for alarm. Because they compete together at the younger ages, I find that today's teens are generally quite accepting, and even supportive, of teammates and opponents of the opposite sex. If it isn't a big deal to the kids, it shouldn't worry parents who grew up in a time when sports were much more strictly separated.

That's not to ignore the sensitivities these situations can create—sensitivities you should discuss with your child up front. Be honest with them. Point out that they'll have to change in separate locker rooms, that they may be taunted by fans (and even opposing parents) during games, and, of course, that the coach is obligated to treat him or her just like every other kid on the team. Don't expect any special favors. Also remind your son or daughter that they could meet some initial resistance. Sure, kids are more open-minded today, but some may still be skeptical, and total acceptance could take a little time.

And keep in mind the health factors. There's no question that many female athletes can physically handle contact sports such as wrestling, ice hockey or football. Parents must make certain, though, that they and their children fully understand



ILLUSTRATION BY S.B. WHITEHEAD

A growing number of girls are catching on in football and other traditionally male sports.

the risks involved with competing against mostly bigger and stronger opponents. You should talk this over not only with your child, but also with your child's doctor.

Lastly, when boys and girls compete, there's the potential "shame" of "getting beat by a girl." Teenagers being who they are, this can be a tough blow to your son's self-esteem, and you must help him put it in perspective. At first, be sensitive and give him some space, but later on in the evening see if you can get him to talk about his feelings. The more he talks, the better off he'll be. And remind him that she actually was no different than any opponent: She trained hard and is an experienced competitor. She's probably beaten many boys. And he may not want to hear it, but he should understand—as should everyone—that female athletes have come a long way in the three decades since Title IX became law. In many instances, their level of skill and athleticism exceeds that of boys and men the same age.

If your kids want to cross traditional gender lines to play a sport, make sure they grasp these potential issues. Then just be as supportive as possible, because it might not be easy for them.

Rick Wolff is chairman of the Center for Sports Parenting (www.sportsparenting.org). His latest book is The Sports Parenting Edge: The Winning Game Plan for Every Athlete from T-Ball to College Recruiting (Running Press).

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Baseball

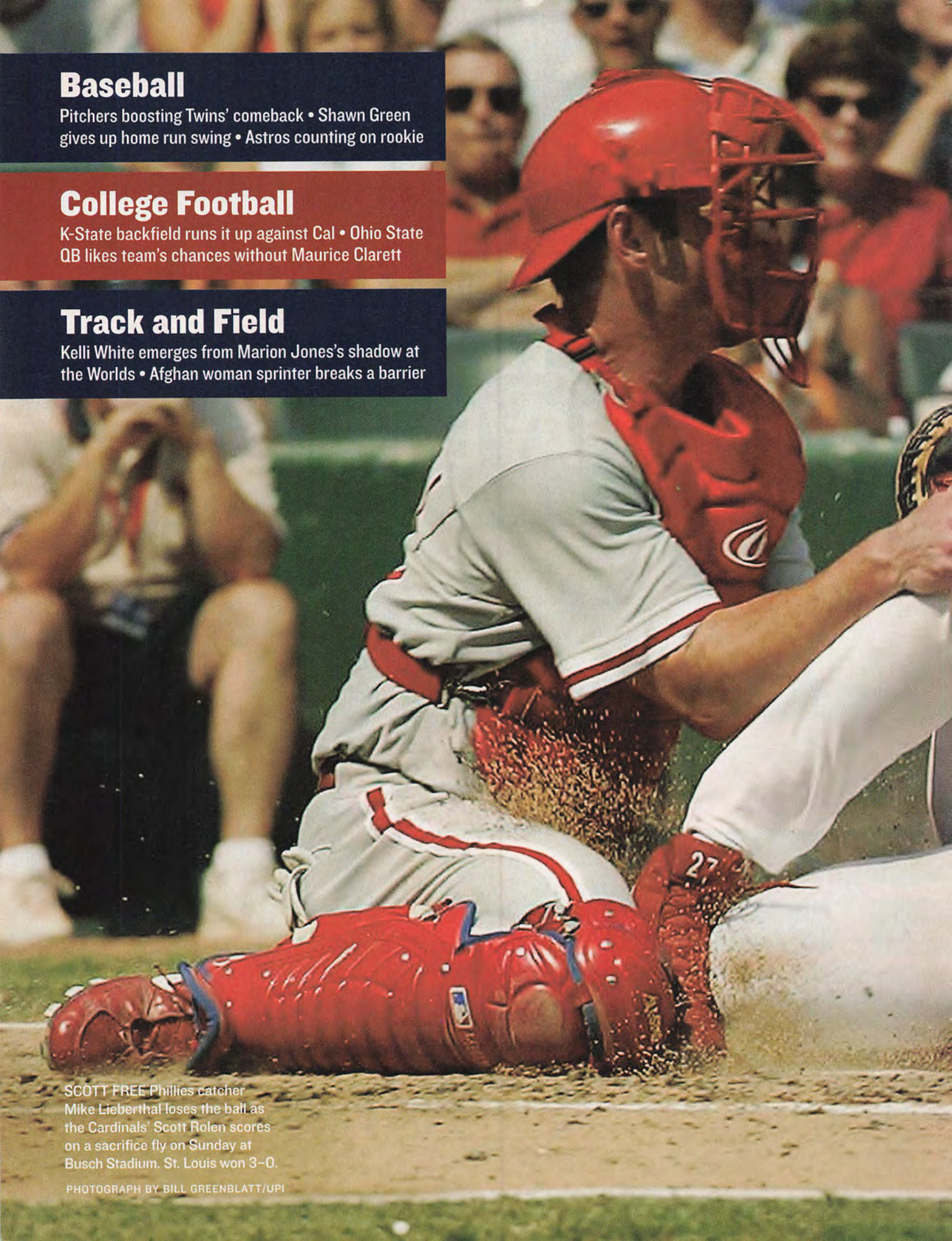
Pitchers boosting Twins' comeback • Shawn Green gives up home run swing • Astros counting on rookie

College Football

K-State backfield runs it up against Cal • Ohio State QB likes team's chances without Maurice Clarett

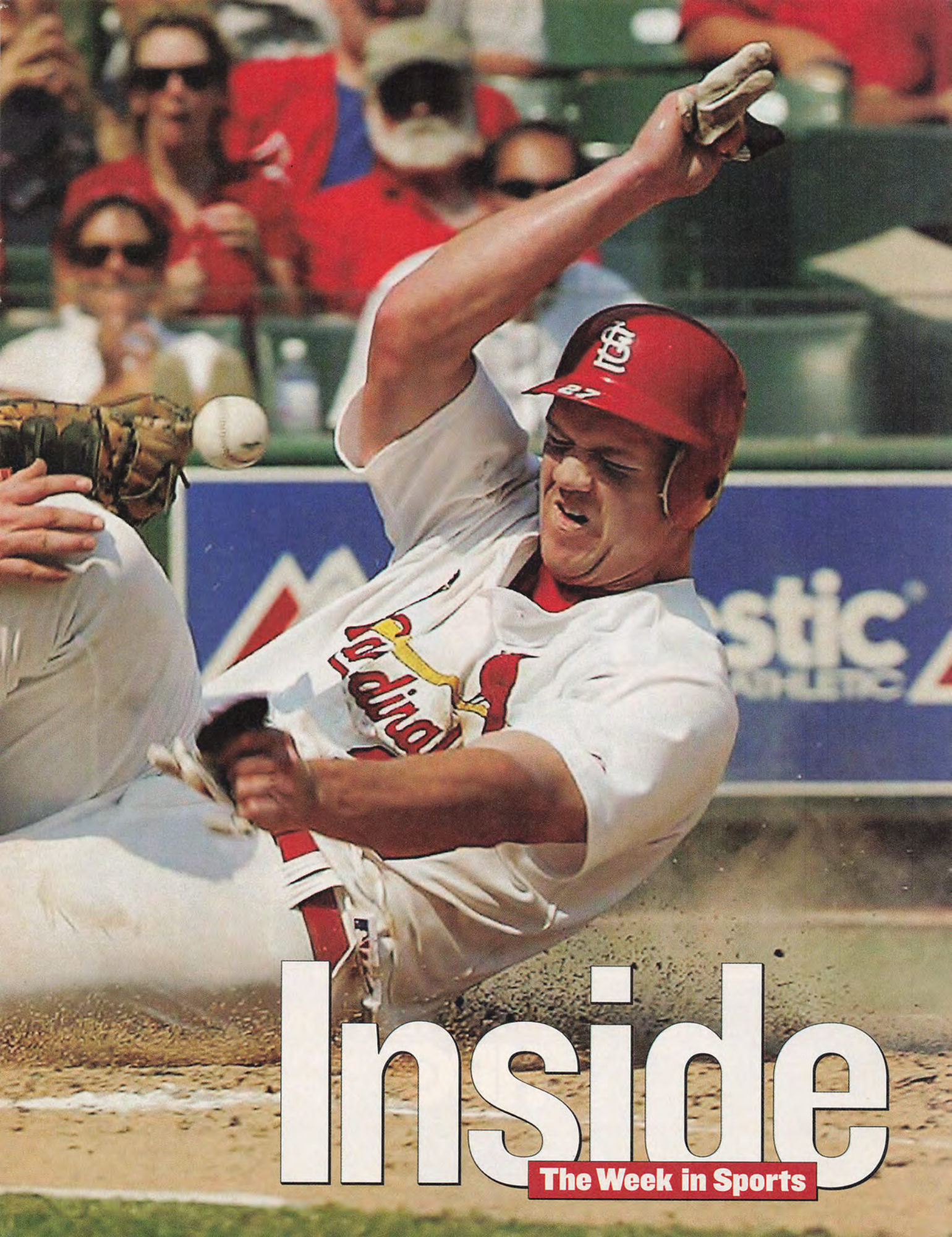
Track and Field

Kelli White emerges from Marion Jones's shadow at the Worlds • Afghan woman sprinter breaks a barrier



SCOTT FREE Phillies catcher Mike Lieberthal loses the ball as the Cardinals' Scott Rolen scores on a sacrifice fly on Sunday at Busch Stadium. St. Louis won 3-0.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BILL GREENBLATT/UPI



Inside

The Week in Sports

THE BEST TEAM NOW PLAYS ON WEDNESDAYS.



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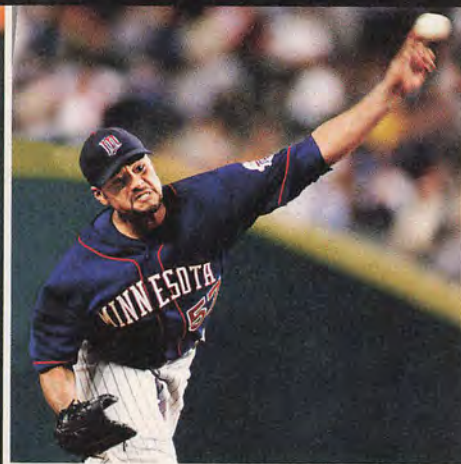
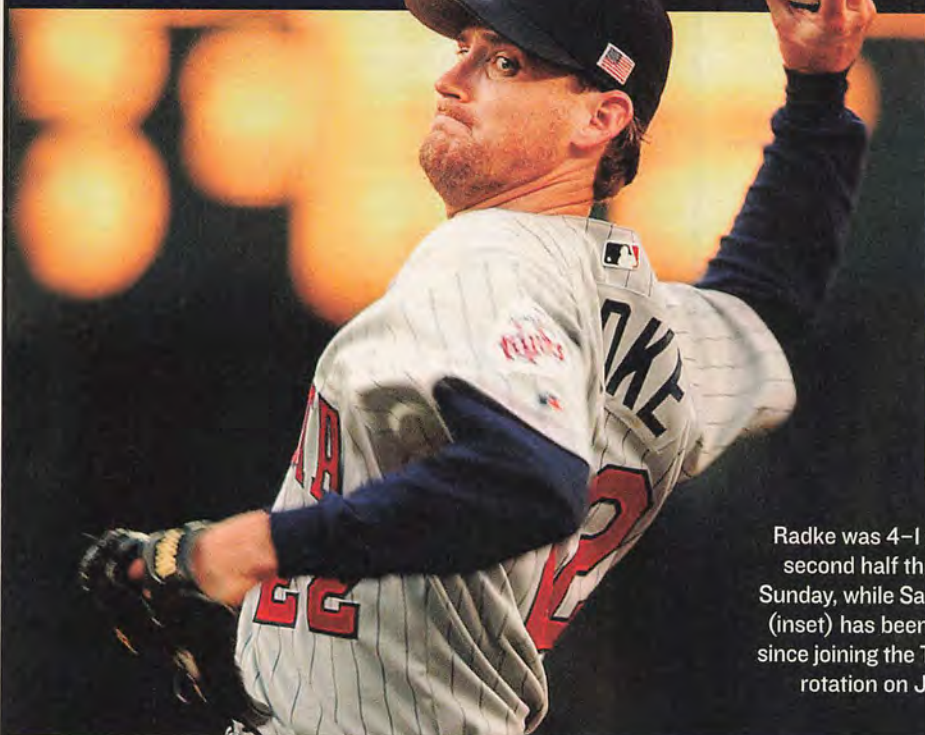


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Inside Baseball



Radke was 4-1 in the second half through Sunday, while Santana (inset) has been solid since joining the Twins' rotation on July 11.

Mind over Batter

A group therapy session of sorts puts the Twins' staff on the road to recovery and the team in the AL Central race

by Albert Chen

A FEW DAYS before the All-Star break Twins pitching coach Rick Anderson met with his beleaguered staff in a session that would have made Dr. Phil proud. A monthlong run of bad outings, during which the starters had a combined 7.37 ERA, was a major reason why Minnesota had fallen from first place in the American League Central, five games ahead of the Royals on June 14, to third place, 7½ games behind Kansas City on July 13.

One by one the pitchers opened up about their struggles to the group. Righthander Brad

Radke, a plate-nibbling finesse pitcher who rarely throws in the 90s, said there were times when he found himself trying to throw 100 mph. Righthander Kyle Lohse conceded he was also guilty of overthrowing. Righthander Joe Mays admitted that he was too preoccupied with trying to make each pitch perfect. And so on.

"Everyone in the rotation looked like they were pressing, trying to do way more than what they're capable of," Anderson says. "That's what I wanted to address."

"The expectations for this team and this pitching staff coming into this season were big," says Radke, "and [the

starters] got caught up in them and put too much pressure on ourselves."

After they advanced to the League Championship Series last year, the Twins were picked by many to run away with the division this season, even to win 100 games. None of that is going to happen, but at least Minnesota (67-63) had scrambled back to within 1½ games of the AL Central-leading White Sox after beating the Royals 8-1 on Sunday. "We're a better team than we've shown," says closer Eddie Guardado, who converted nine of 10 save opportunities and had a 1.80 ERA in the second half through Sunday, "but the impor-

tant thing is that we're still in the hunt."

That's partly because the starting pitching has been much improved (17-9, 4.30 ERA) since the All-Star break. The most consistent pitcher of late has been lefthander Johan Santana, who was 4-2 with a 2.83 ERA since taking a permanent spot in the rotation on July 11. To help the Twins' other starters, who were frequently overthrowing, Anderson instructed them to throw only in the lower half of the strike zone during bullpen sessions between starts. He told them that he wants to see the catchers' mitts moving downward to receive every pitch during those workouts. "If they're constantly throwing to the glove in the bullpen," says Anderson, "then go into a game with the adrenaline [pumping], everything they throw [will go high in the strike zone]."

A perfect example is Radke, a former All-Star and 20-game winner. At the break he was 5-9 with a 5.49 ERA, one of the worst first halves of his nine-year career. But since he's been focusing on keeping his pitches down, Radke has performed more like an ace, going 4-1 with a 3.94 ERA.

The Twins' best pitcher for the season's first 2½ months was

Lohse, who had six wins and a 2.91 ERA by mid-June. Then he suddenly and inexplicably lost his command; his ERA for five starts in July was 11.51. "People began talking about Kyle as a new ace, and that got to him," says Anderson. Lohse has since settled down, going 4-1 with a 4.32 ERA in August. Lefthander Kenny Rogers (3-0 with a 2.45 ERA in his last three starts through Sunday) says that he's also been more relaxed on the mound lately.

Fortunately for Minnesota, it has the league's easiest remaining schedule, with 25 of its final 31 games against teams with losing records. However, a favorable schedule means nothing if the rotation doesn't do its part.

Who is This Guy?



Robertson

Rookie pitcher **Jeriome Robertson** leads the first-place Astros in tattoos, piercings and, most significant, victories (12 at week's end). The 26-year-old lefthander, who also leads the majors in wins by a rookie, has been an unlikely stopper in a rotation that's been hampered by injuries. "He's been more consistent than anyone would have thought," says third baseman Morgan Ensberg. "He's just a [great] athlete."

Robertson struggled in his first six starts, going 1-3 with an 8.36 ERA, and in early May was sent to Triple A New Orleans, where he worked on refining his sinker. After Robertson returned to the rotation on May 16, the Astros won 15 of his next 19 starts. With ace Roy Oswalt battling to come back from his third groin strain of the year, Robertson will play a critical role down the stretch for Houston, which was tied with St. Louis atop the National League Central.

"We feel like we're beginning to click," Lohse says of the starters, "but we need to really pick it up. Then maybe everyone will forget about how bad we were in the first half."

Shawn Green's Adjustment

Power Hitter Pulls the Plug

Early last season Dodgers right-fielder Shawn Green broke out of a slump by belting four home runs in one game, and the two-time All-Star went on to hit 42 for the year. This season Green, who's hitting .274, has yet to hit four homers in one month and, with 12 home runs through Sunday, is in danger of having one of the most dramatic power drop-offs in decades.

Not since Carl Yastrzemski of the Red Sox hit 15 homers in 1971 has a player coming off back-to-back 40-homer seasons (Green hit 49 in 2001) played 100 games and finished the year with 15 or less.

And don't expect a sudden power surge from Green in the final month of the season. Los Angeles was within striking distance in the National League wild-card race (three games behind Philadelphia) at week's end, and Green realizes that trying to hit home runs isn't the best way to help his team. By shortening his swing, he raised his batting average 13 points in August in helping to rectify one of the Dodgers' most glaring problems: getting on base. L.A.'s .302 on-base percentage is 21 points lower than any other team's in the league.

Says Dodgers third-year manager Jim Tracy, "I think the fact that [Green] does not feel compelled to hit home runs to make this club successful has helped put him more at ease."

Read Tom Verducci's *Inside Baseball* column every week at si.com/baseball.

Tom Verducci's View

NOT THAT WILD

The wild card was designed to keep more teams involved in playoff races, but the reality is that late-September rallies are rare. Since the format began in 1995, none of the 64 playoff teams started September more than 2½ games out of a postseason berth, including the wild card. Of those 64 postseason teams, 56 began September as a division or wild-card leader, an 87.5% conversion rate.

Only eight teams in eight years reached the postseason after starting September out of playoff position with a deficit. Here are those teams, including the 1995 Mariners, who trailed the wild-card-leading Royals by percentage points but made up 7½ games on the Angels to win the American League West.



Benito Santiago

Year	Team	Deficit	Leader
1995	Mariners	-	Royals*
1995	Yankees	-2	Royals*
1996	Cardinals	-2½	Astros
1997	Giants	-2½	Dodgers
1998	Rangers	-2½	Angels
2000	Athletics	-2	Indians*
2001	Cardinals	-2	Cubs*
2002	Giants	-1	Dodgers*

*wild card



Cash

CASHING IN

The Blue Jays called up **Kevin Cash**, 25, to handle the bulk of the catching for the rest of the season and prepare him to be their regular backstop in 2004. General manager **J.P. Ricciardi** sees Cash as a solid defensive player who can hit 15 homers a year. How unusual is that kind of production from a young catcher? At week's end only two catchers who are younger than 29 had hit 10 or more homers this year: the Athletics' **Ramon Hernandez** and the Devils Rays' **Toby Hall**. Cash and the Indians' **Victor Martinez**, 24, may be the next best hopes at the position until Twins prospect **Joe Mauer** arrives.

BACK TO EARTH

The Angels jumped from 75 victories in 2001 to 99 wins and the world championship last year mostly by raising their team batting average from .261 (11th in the AL) to .282 (first in the league). "Everything seemed to fall in for them last year," one AL scout said in spring training this year. "No way it happens again."

With essentially the same cast—though DH-first baseman **Brad Fullmer**, centerfielder **Darin Erstad** and third baseman **Troy Glaus** have been injured—Anaheim was hitting .271 (seventh) through Sunday. Of the 11 returning Angels who had played the most in 2003, all had hit worse this year except Fullmer, catcher **Bengie Molina** and leftfielder **Garret Anderson**. In particular, infielder **Scott Spiezio** (.258, down 27 points), **Erstad** (.252, down 31), shortstop **David Eckstein** (.254, down 39) and second baseman **Adam Kennedy** (.273, down 39) have been much worse. Anaheim is in danger of joining the 1998 Marlins to become only the second team to finish last the year after winning the World Series.



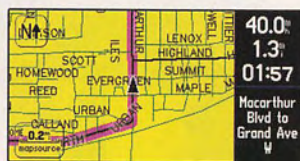
Kennedy

SHORT HOPS

One American League executive gives Seattle the edge over the Yankees as the best team in the league. "New York has a slight edge in starting pitching, but Seattle's bullpen is better—hands down," the executive says. "[Derek] Jeter is not the same at shortstop because of the [shoulder] injury. He can't reach balls to his left that he should get." . . . More evidence that managers don't get optimum use out of their best pitcher: Braves skipper **Bobby Cox** lost three straight games to the Giants last week in the last at bat without ever using his closer, **John Smoltz**. He lost with **Ray King**, **Kevin Gryboski** and **Trey Hodges** on the mound. In fact, Smoltz went eight days between appearances. . . . Nice to see the A's plan to retire **Reggie Jackson's** number 9, but the franchise has been delinquent in honoring Hall of Famers from its Philadelphia roots, especially **Lefty Grove** (10), **Al Simmons** (7) and **Jimmie Foxx** (3). . . . **Randy Johnson** (3-6) and **Barry Zito** (10-11) could become the third set of starting pitchers to post losing records the year after winning the Cy Young Award in their respective leagues, joining **Steve Carlton** and **Pete Vuckovich** in 1982 and '83 and **Mike McCormick** and **Jim Lonborg** in 1967 and '68. Vuckovich, who was 0-2 in 1983, is the only pitcher to go from Cy Young winner to winless.



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1.9'	Turn right on S Grand Ave W	02:57	04:20
2.7'	Turn left on S 2nd St	04:15	04:21
3.4'	Arrive at Romy's Steakhouse on right	05:27	04:23

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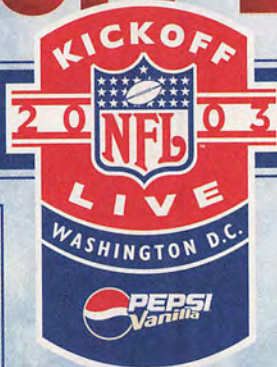


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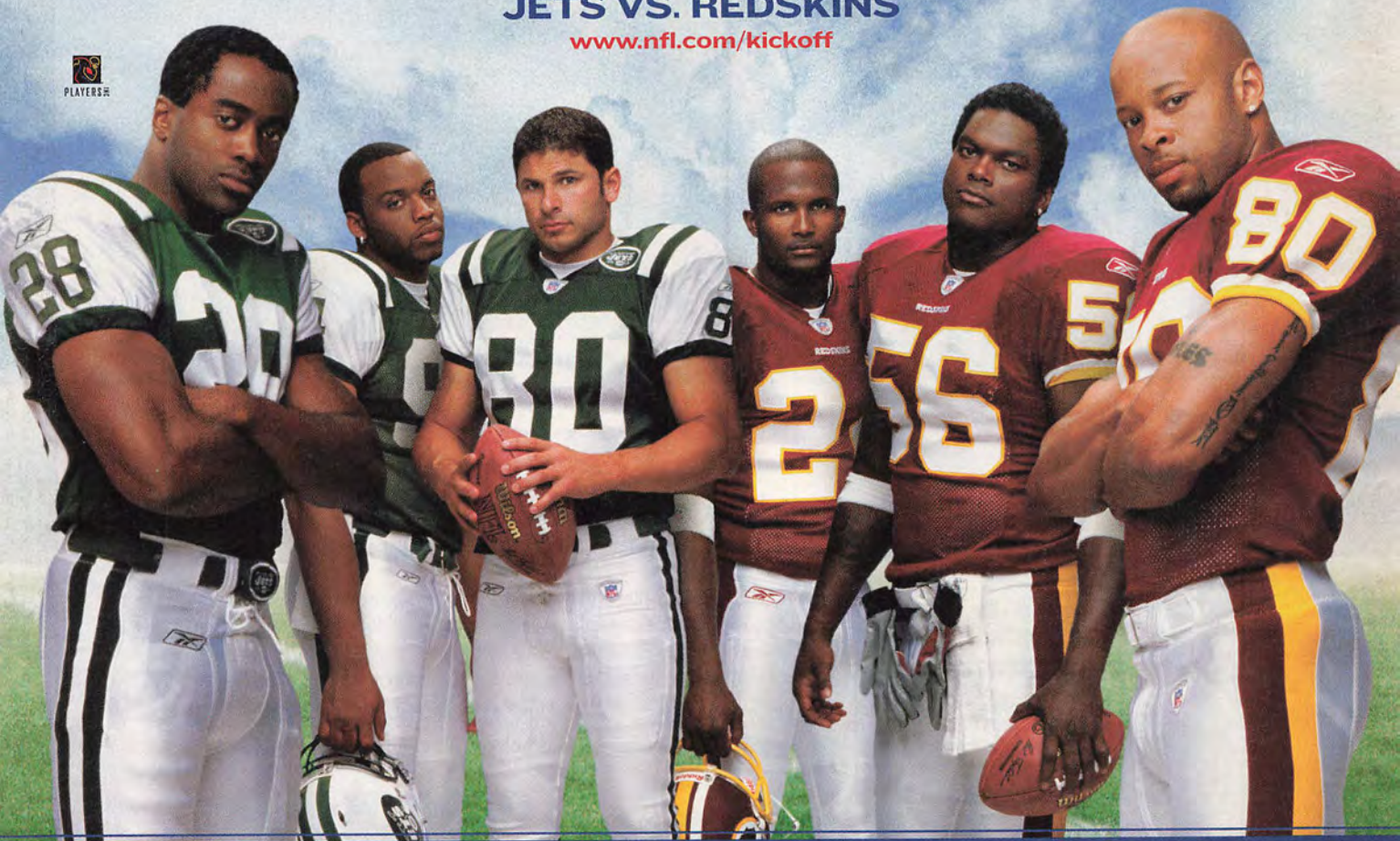


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Inside

College Football



Sproles (43) and Roberson burned Cal for a combined 320 rushing yards.

downs, while Sproles, who set eight Wildcats rushing records last year, carried the ball for a career-high 175 yards.

Of the two, Roberson is the higher-profile player, an emotional leader who overcame a difficult start to his career before settling in as the starting quarterback early last season. Sproles is more reserved. The shy social sciences major, who battles a slight stutter, says he prefers to let his "play speak for itself."

It speaks volumes. Since rushing for 2,485 yards and 49 touchdowns as a senior at Olathe North (Kans.) High in 2000, Sproles has shown what a pint-sized player can accomplish. "The little guy works his butt off," says Wildcats running backs coach Michael Smith. "Just when you think he's rattled on a run, he'll pop out of the pack." Whereas many small runners are partial to the outside, Sproles often has his greatest success up the middle, as when he slalomed through a handful of Bears to begin a 53-yard run on Kansas State's first play from scrimmage. Sproles had two goals in the off-season: to beef up his upper body (he now weighs 188 after adding 18 pounds) and improve his pass-blocking.

After six straight seasons in which their defense finished sixth or better nationally in total yards allowed per game, the Wildcats may have to rely more on their offense this year. Coach Bill Snyder, who is famously frugal with praise, admitted after Saturday's win that he "would be hard-pressed" to name a better backfield in his 15 years at Kansas

State. In a separate postgame press conference Cal coach Jeff Tedford said that Roberson and Sproles "are maybe as good as anyone in the country."

Of course, pre-Labor Day proclamations don't carry much weight. But if Roberson and Sproles keep up the tag-team approach, Big 12 opponents can expect to have their hands full. □

Scary Pair

Ell Roberson and Darren Sproles give Kansas State a lethal backfield

by Kelley King

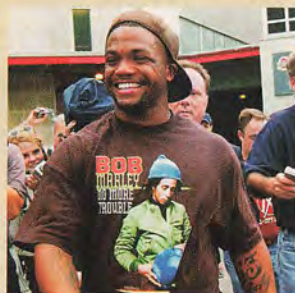
IF THE Heisman had a doubles division, the duo of Kansas State senior quarterback Ell Roberson and junior running back Darren Sproles would surely be an early favorite. Although the seventh-ranked Wildcats had some shaky moments in a 42-28 win over California in the Black Coaches Association Classic last Saturday, Roberson and Sproles showed how dangerous a talented backfield tandem can be.

In front of a pro-Wildcats crowd at Kansas City's Arrowhead Stadium, a Cal defense with

just two returning starters was forced to pick its purple poison: Roberson, a nimble runner and increasingly poised passer, or Sproles, a 5' 7" speed demon who infiltrates weak defenses quicker than the latest Internet worm. Both players proved equally dangerous out of the option, the formation that Kansas State uses on more than 90% of its offensive plays. By game's end the pair had run for 320 yards and established a few personal bests. Roberson, who broke the school record for quarterback rushing yards with 1,032 in 2002, had a career-high three passing touch-

Clarett Sidelined

Even before his team's first preseason practice, Ohio State senior quarterback **Craig Krenzel** was ready for questions about **Maurice Clarett**. "A bunch of people are going to be asking me about Maurice," Krenzel said of the Buckeyes' star sophomore running back, who was under investigation by the university and the NCAA for violations ranging from improper academic help to falsely reporting stolen property. "Maurice is a great



player, but we won all the games he missed last year, and we're confident that we'll do the same thing this year."

That theory will now be tested. Last Friday, Ohio State announced that Clarett will miss "multiple games," which could be six or more. Clarett returned to the team on Sunday, but he'll sit out Saturday's opener against Washington.

Ohio State has 10 offensive starters back (minus Clarett), but in order for the Buckeyes to repeat as national champs, they'll need Krenzel and junior running backs **Lydell Ross** and **Maurice Hall**, who combined to rush for 989 yards in 2002, to step up. —Tim Layden

Inside Track and Field



Fast Work

Kelli White escaped Marion Jones's shadow and won the world 100 title

by Brian Cazeneuve

AT THE World Track and Field Championships in Paris on Sunday, California's Kelli White ran like the seasoned champion she wasn't and reveled like the novice victor she was. After winning the 100 meters in 10.85 seconds—the year's fastest time—the 26-year-old White skipped, jumped and spun around clockwise, then spun in the other direction, trying to figure out how to channel her euphoria. "I'm not used to celebrating like that," she said.

White's exuberance brought some welcome life to the sprints, which had been in the doldrums all year. With Olympic champion Marion Jones absent while having a baby and men's stars

Maurice Greene and Tim Montgomery off form, 100-meter times had been slow, and the Paris sprints looked wide open.

Indeed, on Monday night Kim Collins of St. Kitts and Nevis was the surprise winner of the men's 100, running a 10.07 to edge Darrel Brown of Trinidad by .01 in the slowest world or Olympic final since 1983. World-record holder Montgomery, the top U.S. finisher, was fifth in 10.11. It was the first time since 1995 that an American had failed to win the men's 100 at the Worlds and perhaps a sign of things to come at next year's Athens Olympics. "[Sprinting has] come out of an era of domination," said U.S. sprint coach Harvey Glance. "It has moved into one that mirrors the '60s and '70s, when we never

In Sunday's final the 26-year-old White ran the year's fastest time.

knew who was going to win."

Greene had scratched from the semifinals with soreness in his tendinitis-plagued right knee. Montgomery was not in top form either. He arrived in Paris, by his own admission, as "a basket case" after two dismal performances on the European circuit, which he blamed on an allergic reaction to peanuts. "When something like that takes over your body," he said, "it's out of your control."

White had no such problems—only the specter of Jones hanging over her, almost literally. Jones, Montgomery's girlfriend, who gave birth to their first child, Tim Jr., on June 28, was in the stands beyond the finish line doing TV commentary for Eurosport, and she was cheered each time her face appeared on the scoreboard. Talk of Jones seemed to irk White two days before the women's final, when she was asked if the sport was suffering from Jones's absence. "Does the sport have feelings?" White asked. "We want to prove that we can do just as well as Marion. We haven't been given our due lately."

Jones, 27, agreed with that assessment. "I won't be around forever in this sport," she told SI on Saturday. "It's time we appreciate other great U.S. sprinters."

White has been on the track since childhood, when her mother, Debra, a relay runner on the 1972 Jamaican Olympic team, used to bring her to workouts. Kelli's father, Willie, was a talented U.S. high school runner. Kelli was following in her parents' cleat steps as a high school junior in Union City, Calif., in 1994 when

a random attacker, who was never caught, stabbed her in the face while she waited for a train. "The doctor stopped counting at 300 stitches," says White, who still sports a scar above her left eye. "I'm lucky to be alive."

She went on to Tennessee, where she never won an NCAA or SEC title. This spring, determined to improve, she added 13 pounds of muscle while giving her right foot—which had been plagued by plantar fasciitis for more than a year—time to heal, then won both the 100 and the 200 at the U.S. nationals in June.

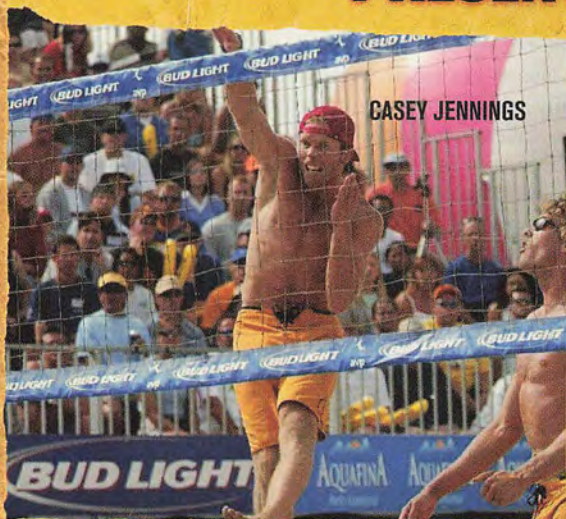
"I used to doubt myself, but I knew it was somebody's time," White said last week at the world championships. "Why not mine?" □

Out of the Blocks

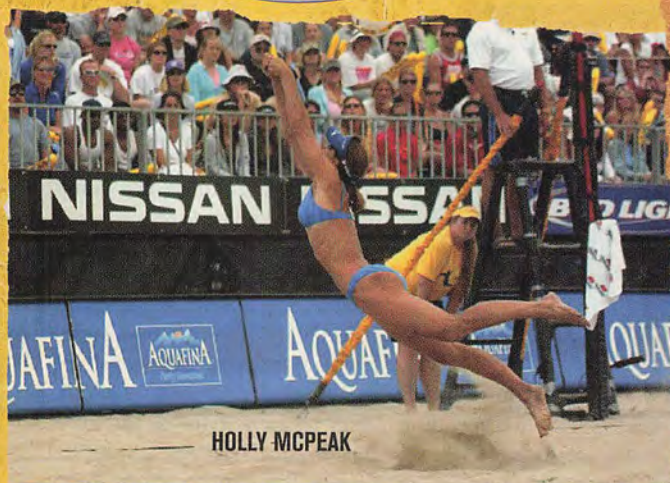
Emerging star **Kenenisa Bekele**, 21, led Ethiopia to a medal sweep in the men's 10,000 meters, outsprinting legendary teammate **Haile Gebrselassie**, the Olympic and world champ, who finished second. Kenyans failed to win a medal in the race for the first time since the 1983 Worlds. . . . **Lima Azimi**, 23, became the first Afghan woman to compete in a major international championship, finishing last in her heat of the 100 in 18.37 seconds. Azimi wore blue sweatpants and a plain gray T-shirt, forgoing the even more stringent dress code she has adhered to as a Muslim. "This is the first time I've been outdoors with nothing on my arms and my hair uncovered," she said. "I'm not allowed to wear shorts, and I don't want to." The IOC suspended the Afghanistan Olympic Committee in 1999 but reinstated it early this year. . . . Swedish heptathlete **Carolina Klüft**, 20, became the third woman to break the 7,000-point barrier, turning in six personal bests in seven events to win the world title with 7,001 points. —B.C.

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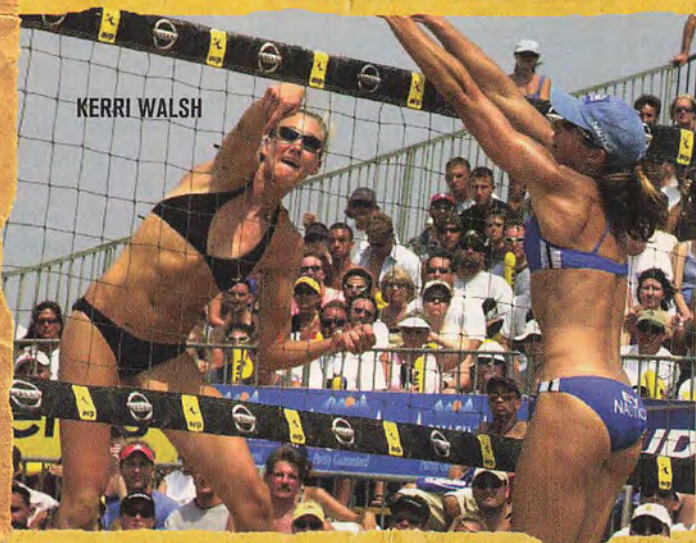
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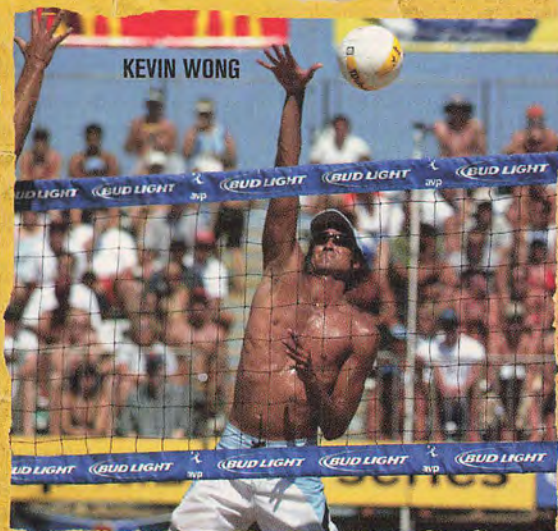
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Health Nut

by Rick Reilly



HOW DOES a violence dispenser like Oakland Raiders linebacker Bill Romanowski play 15 years in the NFL without *ever* missing a game?

Something like this:

7 a.m.—Romo arrives at Raiders headquarters. He's well-rested, maybe because he takes ZMA, GABA and/or melatonin—all legal supplements—to help him sleep.

Few athletes in the world are as obsessed with reading about, thinking about and spending money on their bodies as Romo.

Who else do you know who has physical trainers, chiropractors, yoga instructors, acupuncturists, Pilates instructors, Reiki therapists and other consultants, about 20 in all, on his payroll? Or owns a hyperbaric chamber? Or has injected living pancreas, brain and adrenal cells of pure-strain Scottish sheep into his body?

Who else do you know who regularly sends out samples of his blood, feces and urine to a North Carolina laboratory to check for mineral deficiencies in his diet? (Hey, who's the lucky UPS guy?)

"People who call me a wacko," says Romo, "can look at all those games I've played in a row." That's 240 straight, the most ever for a linebacker. Or a wacko.

7:32—Romo hooks up one of his two electrical microcurrent stimulators to his body. The sessions last 20 to 30 minutes and are repeated on various parts of his body several times a day. "Each part of your body has a certain electrical frequency," says Romo, "including emotions. I can put it on the JOY setting, and I can't help but crack a smile."

Wait, there's Al Davis. Can we get him hooked up to it?

9:55—After team meetings Romo downs one of three power shakes he'll drink today. They're crammed full of unpronounceable stuff and count toward his colossal intake of 250 grams of protein a day. He'll also gulp between 100 and 130 pills throughout the day, depending on what his feces sample, his consultants and his body are telling him.

He carries his pills in a plastic container the size of a welcome mat—about 500 colorful vitamins and supplements divided into dozens of tiny compartments. Inside it looks like Willy Wonka's briefcase. One time, he dropped it. "It took me three hours to pick the pills all up and sort them again," he says.

10:03—While the rest of the Raiders sit to stretch, Romo moves up and down the field with his personal stretching consultant. Some days the guy will stretch Romo for four hours, but today it's got to be quick. As Romo's walking along he'll suddenly kick his

tree-trunk leg over his head like a very odd-looking Rockette.

Noon—For lunch, Romo downs mass quantities of food, carefully selected by his nutritionist, be it almond-butter-covered rice cakes or the occasional shark cartilage. Romo may spit loogies in your face—as he did to San Francisco 49ers receiver J.J. Stokes six years ago—but at least you know they're organic.

Across the way 330-pound lineman Frank Middleton is asked if any of Romo's ways have rubbed off on him. "Are you kiddin'?" Middleton says. "Man, I'm fat. I got no muscle. I got nothin' to pull, stretch, hurt or tear."

Meanwhile, a few Raiders are going to a fast-food joint. "I like it when they go there," Romo says. "Maybe that's why I'm still playing. I hope they *keep* going."

12:40 p.m.—Practice. Even at 37, nobody's engine revs higher than Romo's. His bursts still come straight out of 1988, his rookie year. He still sprints after Jerry Rice to the end zone and

back on every play. His eyes are still the size of hubcaps, perhaps because of the CDP choline and pheryl he takes for intensity.

3:30—Most of the other players head home, but Romotron is just getting warmed up. He has another power shake—"phosphorous and colostrum with a nice root beer flavor," he says, beaming. *Yummy!* That's

Romanowski has another power shake—"phosphorous and colostrum with a nice root beer flavor," he says, beaming.

followed by 45 minutes of weightlifting and then a 45-minute soft-tissue massage.

If this were postgame, though, he'd start an IV of 50 grams of vitamin C and five of glutathione to fight what he calls the "massive amount of stress" he puts on his body. Romo has the pain threshold of an anvil—he once played with a torn oblique muscle, which is like playing with a wolf trap snapped onto your stomach.

Oh, he never missed a game in college, high school, middle school or peewee, either. When's the last time he got sick? "Can't remember," he says.

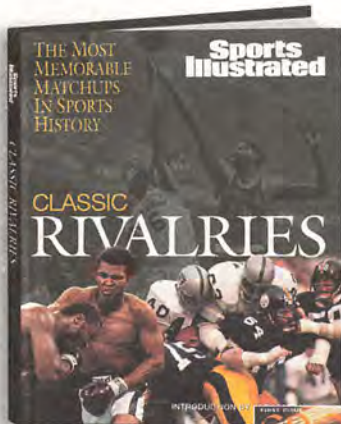
5:05—More stretching, followed by 40 minutes of hopping from a 40° cold tub to a 110° hot tub. In between Romo glugs water purified by his own portable ionizer. He'll drink two gallons today. "I had to drink bottled water the other day," he says. "Awful."

8:08—More self-electrocution, followed by a full-body coating of zinc and copper cream, then a TV interview, and it's finally time for mad little linebackers to go home. Another easy 13-hour day. As the last one at the complex, he turns out the lights.

10:03—At home Romo indulges his sweet tooth with a tiny sliver of cheesecake.

Boy, some people have no sense of commitment. □

If you have a comment for Rick Reilly, send it to reilly@siletters.com.



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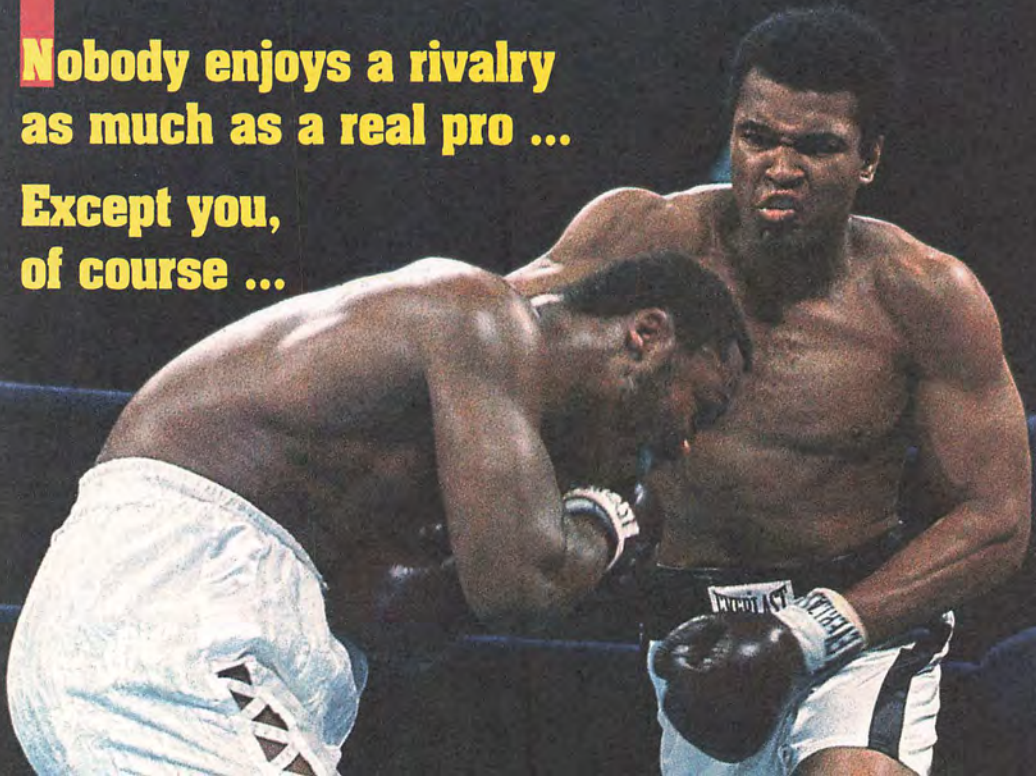
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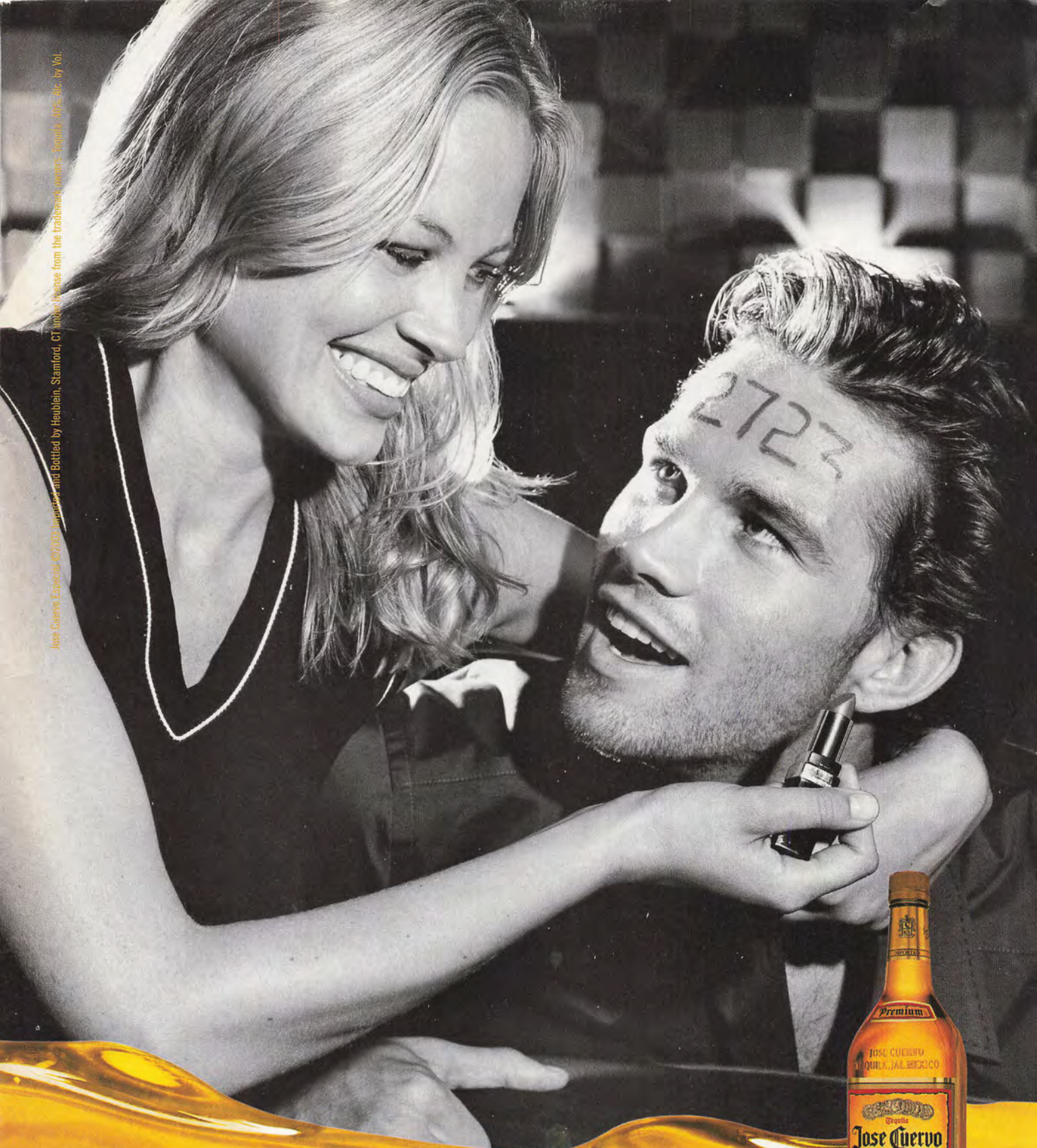
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